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From Physics to Metaphysics:
Philosophy and Style in the Critical Writings of T. S. Eliot
(1913-1935)

by

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Abstract

This thesis considers Eliot's critical writing from the late 1910s till the mid-1930s, in the light of his PhD thesis – *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* – and a range of unpublished material: *T. S. Eliot's Philosophical Essays and Notes (1913- 4)* in the Hayward Bequest (King's College, Cambridge University); T. S. Eliot's Family Papers in the T. S. Eliot Collection at the Houghton Library (Harvard University); and items from the Harvard University Archives at the Pusey Library. The thesis offers a comprehensive view of Eliot's critical development throughout this important period. It starts by considering *The Sacred Wood*'s ambivalence towards the metaphysical philosophy of F. H. Bradley and Eliot's apparent adoption of a scientific method, under the influence of Bertrand Russell. It will be argued that Eliot uses rhetorical strategies which simultaneously subvert the method he is propounding, and which set the tone for an assessment of his criticism throughout the 1920s. His indecision, in this period, about the label 'Metaphysical' for some poets of the seventeenth century, reveals the persistence of the philosophical thought he apparently rejects in 1916, when he chooses not to pursue a career in philosophy in Harvard. This rhetorical tactic achieves its fulfilment in *Dante* (1929), where Eliot finds a model in the medieval allegorical method and 'philosophical' poetry. Allegory is also examined in connection with the evaluation of Eliot's critical writings themselves to determine, for instance, the figurative dimension of his early scientific vocabulary and uncover metaphysical residues he had explicitly disowned but would later embrace. Finally, it is suggested that, the hermeneutics of allegory are historical and it is used here to test the relationship between Eliot's early and later critical writings, that is the early *physics* and the later *metaphysics*.

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La sua voluntade é nostra pace.

Abbreviations

Works by T. S. Eliot:

SW	*The Sacred Wood* (1920) (New York: Methuen, 1986)
FLA	*For Lancelot Andrewes* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928)
SE	*Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932)
TUPUC	*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) (London: Faber and Faber, 1964)
SPh	*T. S. Eliot Selected Prose*, John Hayward ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1953)
KE	*Knowledge and Experience* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964)
SP	*Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, Frank Kermode ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux - Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975)
Letters	*The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, Valerie Eliot ed., I (1898-1922), (London: Faber & Faber, 1988)
VMP	*The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry: The Clark Lectures (at Trinity College, Cambridge, 1926) and The Turnbull Lectures (At the John Hopkins University, 1933)*, Ronald Schuchard ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1993)

Introduction

This thesis starts from the premise that T. S. Eliot was a serious student of philosophy before turning to literature and it continues by attempting to determine the significance of this background in his development as a literary critic. It concerns itself only with Eliot's prose writings, and the importance of philosophy in the interpretation of his literary criticism up to the mid 1930s. The choice of this date is partly determined by Eliot's own suggestion in *To Criticize the Critic* (1965) that his critical career may be divided into three periods: the first runs to the end of his involvement with the *Egoist* in 1918; the second covers roughly the whole of the 1920s which then give way to a period "of public lectures and addresses, rather than articles and reviews."[1] The stylistic tensions which mark the development of Eliot's critical voice are at their most evident in the earlier parts, if only because these writings are ultimately about the problem of the use and style of critical language. It is my intention to argue that Eliot's turn from philosophy to literature was instigated by the hope of finding in the *literary*, a style which would make up for the one which had defeated him in his philosophical studies.

Eliot's search for style is not only a poetic but also a critical concern, where philosophy becomes a major protagonist throughout. As he himself noted towards the end of his life: "I spent three years, when young, in the study of philosophy. What remains to me of these studies? The style of three philosophers: Bradley's English, Spinoza's Latin and Plato's Greek."[2] My purpose is not to determine which particular philosophical school is more responsible for Eliot's literary theories, but in which ways philosophy as a genre determines the development of his critical style, and, only in passing, also of his poetry. To this extent my consideration of the influence of individual philosophers over Eliot's work aims to depart from the sort of scholarship which tries to align his criticism with particular schools of philosophy. The importance of critics such as Jeffrey Perl, Donald Childs, Piers Gray, Richard Shusterman, Hugh Kenner, Anne C. Bolgan among others cannot be underestimated. Yet this approach is

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[1] T. S. Eliot, 'To Criticize the Critic' in *To Criticize the Critic: And Other Writings* (1965)(London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), pp. 17-18.

[2] 'To Criticize the Critic', pp. 20-21.

potentially dangerous, particularly given the opacity of philosophy as a specialist subject. In poetry it tends to become a self-justifying process, where the critics tend to see in Eliot's verse the resolution and embodiment of his philosophical thought; on the other hand, Eliot scholars are sometimes tempted to consider his literary criticism as thinly veiled philosophical treatises.[3]

On the 24th October, 1913, Eliot delivered a paper at Harvard's Philosophical Club of which he was the president. He was twenty-five, and was studying towards a PhD in philosophy. The paper was entitled 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics'.[4] As a whole this paper fires a warning shot about the process by which politics pursues metaphysical legitimization:

> So the question I would lay before you is this: what need and what right has politics to a metaphysics; and when a political theory has such philosophical affiliations of what sort is the relationship; is it logical or purely emotional? May the same generalisations lie at the basis of both structures?[5]

The subtext to this set of questions is an equally worried concern about contemporary philosophy in general, with its false metaphysical pretensions which really hide a cheap emotional appeal rather than true intellectual coherence. Eliot notes:

> This is a time in which philosophies lend themselves, or at least offer themselves, with great facility to emotional consequences. A time of what a pragmatist friend of mine has called lyric philosophers. James' philosophical writings constitute an emotional attitude more than a book of dogma; the neo-realistic movement appears to the uninitiated at least a spontaneous outburst of genius, a song without words; and we observe Mr B. Russell directing with passionate enthusiasm his unearthly ballet of bloodless alphabet. Professor Bosanquet is the prophet who has put off his shoes and talked to the Absolute in a burning bush; to Professor Royce we owe the [illegible] of Christianity by the method of last aid to the dead. And the landscape is decorated with Bergsonians in various degrees of recovery from intellect[6]

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3 In the introduction to *From Philosophy to Poetry: T. S. Eliot's Study of Knowledge and Experience* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), Donald J. Childs addresses the problem of the philosophical appropriation of Eliot's criticism and poetry by various generations of critics. Childs begins by noting the early prevalence of the 'second-hand' Bradley approach, and then moves on to subsequent appropriations of critics grouped under a number of headings: 'the Bergsonian Eliot', 'the Indian Eliot', 'the Anthropological Eliot', 'the Poststructural Eliot', 'the Pragmatic Eliot', 'the Semiotic Eliot', 'the Analytic Eliot', 'the Existential Eliot', 'the Phenomenological Eliot', 'the Hermeneutic Eliot', 'the Psychological Eliot', 'the Mystical Eliot', and 'the Political Eliot'. Childs is not trying to discourage these approaches, but aims to delimit their individual application. Yet, he adds: "Criticism of Eliot that is unaware of the extent to which his early philosophical study of knowledge and experience is 'not abandoned' in his criticism, poetry and politics, and so on, is undoubtedly impoverished", p. 48.

4 A cover note suggests this title and states that it is a response to Walter Lippman's *A Preface to Politics* (Kennerly, 1913); *The Harvard University Gazette* confirms that Eliot scheduled its delivery to the Harvard Philosophical Club for the 17th, but postponed it to the 24th, *The Harvard University Gazette*, 9 (11th October, 1913).

5 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics' (MS), T. S. Eliot's Family Papers, T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, p. 1.

6 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', pp. 1-2.

In one long paragraph Eliot's black humour consigns all current philosophy to oblivion. The key complaint is that held against these "lyric philosophers", who "lend themselves, or at least offer themselves, with great facility to emotional consequences". This was a premise which was to dominate much of his reviewing in the late 1910s, as a way of criticising the lack of rigour of non-scientific thought. At this earlier stage he is condemning all philosophy without distinction, metaphysical as well as scientific. Russell's passionate enthusiasm for his "unearthly bloodless ballet of bloodless alphabet" is happily compared to Bosanquet's chat with "the Absolute in a burning bush"[7]. Whether one approaches the problem from an empirical or idealist perspective, Eliot seems to suggest, one ends up with the same meaningless jargon.

'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics' amounts to Eliot's hammering the final nail in the coffin of his short involvement with Bergsonianism, initiated during his stay in Paris between 1910 and 1911. But it also marks the beginning of a long struggle to shrug off Pragmatism which was dominating Harvard at the time:

> [Pragmatism and Bergsonianism] seem to me at bottom very different. Bergson denies human values; for pragmatism man is the measure of all things. The latter is a 'practical' philosophy. You choose a point of view because you like it. Yet the two philosophies, like all anti-thetical philosophies, tend to meet. For they both reduce the world to illusion . . . Philosophy is to fit a need. On the other hand we cannot tell what this need is unless we philosophise. Pragmatism needs to be supplemented by a theory of the relation of human life to the world. And with this completion it would I think cease to be pragmatism.[8]

Both Pragmatism and Bergsonianism are criticised for encouraging an unholy alliance between politics and metaphysics, each appropriating the other from their own extreme position. These extremes meet in the erroneous conclusion of refusing credibility to human values outside themselves: pragmatism by considering them in terms of cash value, Bergsonianism by allowing them but transitory value which is inevitably overcome by the unforgiving forces of the *élan vital* of history. Human existence is thus reduced to a Behavioral animism, to biology and psychology, a position which Eliot rejects. Pragmatism makes all philosophy a political pursuit for which it illegitimately recruits metaphysical legitimization. Much of Eliot's later

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7 Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923) was an Oxford contemporary of F. H. Bradley and, like the latter, was also considered a member of the late 19th-century school of British Idealism. Bosanquent placed himself in the tradition of Kant, Hegel and, ultimately, Plato. Yet, he was well aware of 19th-century Anglo-American empiricism and materialism. The result was a brand of idealist philosophical thought that combined the Anglo-Saxon penchant for empirical study with a vocabulary and conceptual apparatus borrowed from the continent. This is precisely the kind of esoteric philosophy Eliot parodies as "the Absolute in a burning bush".

8 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', p. 21.

critical development depends of his struggle to understand the metaphysical impulse of philosophy, while seeking their legitimate convergence. At this early stage Eliot must first tell them apart.

The approach this thesis has adopted may be blamed for separating discourse from subject matter, and perhaps for underestimating the seriousness of Eliot's commitment to particular philosophical theories. But this seems to be the very separation called for in 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics'. Indeed, Eliot is not an intellectual opportunist only concerned with utilizing a philosophical *gravitas* for his own literary purposes, but neither is he a believer in the synthesizing power of any particular brand of philosophy. He is, however, an intellectual aesthete of sorts throughout the 1910s, but this is as good as a genuine philosophical position gets given the philosophical climate of this early period. He takes refuge in form. Early twentieth-century philosophy was, in fact, increasingly concerned with the *mediation* of ideas as the very site of philosophical doctrine. The rise of analytic philosophy in Britain is the point in case, with which Eliot first came into contact when Russell went to Harvard as visiting professor in 1914. Eliot was, however, familiar with his philosophy from his readings of *New Realism*, which hit Harvard two years earlier. This philosophical school was hoping to by-pass philosophy's cul-de-sacs by offering logic, within a empirical framework, as a way of clarifying and giving finality to philosophical questions. The picture I am left with is that of a young Eliot, who must leave academic philosophy, but who turns to aesthetics, precisely as a kind of philosophical commitment. Any speculation about Eliot's philosophical allegiances must be controlled by the intellectual climate in which he *abandons* philosophy when he decides not to return to Harvard in 1916. The paradox is that Eliot's rejection of philosophy is coherent with new *philosophical* developments, even though these developments were calling for the end of philosophy and hailing the supremacy of science in the form of logic. One might say that Eliot rejects philosophy for philosophical reasons; the reason being that one can no longer hold intellectual positions on metaphysical grounds but must test the coherence of one's thought in the very language one uses to express the subject of his/her allegiances.

Though, by 1916, Eliot had just completed his doctoral thesis on the British idealist F. H. Bradley, it is possible to deduce that Eliot, at this early stage, had become a follower of Russell. Interestingly Bradley is not among the philosophers he attacks in 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', though Bosanquet is, and he was an admirer of Bradley, but so is Russell. Whatever Eliot's misgivings about Bradley's brand of philosophy might have been, they did upset his plans to visit Marburg in 1914 to study German philosophy – and where he annotated his copy of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* – in preparation for Oxford and Bradley. The reality is that Russell is important because he represents the prevalent climate of dissatisfaction with the abstractions of philosophy and the growing concern with making its language subject to the exactitude expected from the sciences. Eliot may by the late 1910s share this concern. Yet it is not as simple as that, given his constant questioning of the objectivist claims of science in both his doctoral dissertation and some of his graduate papers. The analysis of some of Eliot's unpublished graduate papers is particular helpful in exposing his anti-scientific bias as late as the period 1913-1914 when Eliot attended Josiah Royce's seminars on Logic at Harvard. Eliot's notes 'Description and Interpretation' and his paper 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual' are direct attacks on the scientific pretension to access and give account of data in its original form.

The importance of Eliot's graduate papers is invaluable to avoid taking his early literary criticism and dissertation at face value. His graduate papers open a space in which intellectual doubts mingle with an attempt to find a firm philosophical position. This kind of work has been pioneered by Jeffrey Perl whose articles have done much to focus Eliot's philosophical background.[9] His work is important because it has added additional material without which it would be easy to overemphasize Eliot's Bradleyanism in his dissertation, or Russell's logical rigour in his early literary criticism. Perl offers an explicit alternative to the Bradleyan overcompensation perpetuated by the likes of Anne C. Bolgan, who must be credited

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[9] See Jeffrey Perl and Andrew Tuck's 'The Significance of T. S. Eliot's Notebooks' in *T. S. Eliot: Essays From the Southern Review*, James Onley ed. (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 157-178, and Jeffrey Perl's 'The Language of Theory and the Language of Poetry: The Significance of T. S. Eliot's Notebooks, Part Two', *Southern Review*, 21, no1 (Winter 1985), pp. 1012-1023.

for encouraging Eliot to publish his dissertation[10], or Hugh Kenner[11], who while acknowledging the debt to Bradley finds little more to say about its significance. Donald Childs is among the critics who notes the short-comings of this sort of criticism and attempts a more sophisticated application of Eliot's dissertation over the interpretation of his early poetry in 'Knowledge and Experience in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.[12] This kind of work is not without its relevance, but fails to address the complexity of Eliot's philosophical background full on. One has to wait, perhaps until his *T. S. Eliot, Mystic, Son and Lover* to see a broader approach to the philosophical question via the exploration of Eliot's Harvard years. Such explorations are only complete if one is prepared to dig into Eliot's unpublished material up to 1916. Childs does this to some extent, particularly with respect to Eliot's graduate courses and his early interest in religion, mysticism and Hindu philosophy which he studied under Professor J. H. Woods. But for fuller accounts one must turn to Jain Manju's invaluable *T. S. Eliot and American Philosophy* (1992), which (following in the tradition of Piers Gray's early *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development* (1982)) excavates Eliot's philosophical experience found in his unpublished papers and notes, rather than just skimming the Bradleyan surface of his dissertation.

It is the sheer impenetrability of Eliot's dissertation which has to be looked into in its own right. His reluctance to publish it in 1964 was because, as Eliot confesses in its introduction – with what degree of false modesty it is difficult to determine -, he could no longer claim to understand everything contained in it. This problem is symptomatic of Eliot's very struggle at the time he wrote it and not just attributable to the time span between its completion and publication fifty-two years later. *Knowledge and Experience* is challenging not just because of the specialist nature of its subject, but because of the obscurity of its style. Notwithstanding its philosophical worth – as J. H. Woods testifies in a letter in 1916 which

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10 Her casual discovery of Eliot's thesis initiated a campaign to convince Eliot of its publication. She succeeded, though it led to an extreme revisionist approach to reread all of Eliot's work in the light of Bradley's philosophy. See Anne C. Bolgan, 'The Philosophy of Bradley and the Mind of T.S. Eliot: An Introduction' in *English Literature and British Philosophy*, S. P. Rosebaum ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 251-277.

11 See Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky,1959)

12 See Donald Childs, 'Knowledge and Experience in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'', *ELH*, 55, no3 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 685-699.

encourages Eliot to return to Harvard to take the oral examination[13] – Eliot's dissertation is a laboured discursive effort which puzzles more than convinces, just as his early criticism also puzzles yet somehow convinces by a kind of rhetorical inertia, which hypnotizes the reader to go on nodding to the final full stop. It is this stylistic quality which first strikes the reader of his criticism, and it is my intention to turn to it as the means to do full justice to the relationship between Eliot's philosophical and literary experiences.

One must consider the idea that Eliot abandons philosophy as an attempt to write better. Such a study must, then, seek the origins of this problem of style to determine precisely what Eliot rejects and what he keeps from his philosophical experience. It is perhaps easier to name what he rejects as 'metaphysics'. In the essays and reviews collected in *The Sacred Wood*, metaphysics becomes a by-word for stylistic impressionism and obscurity. This figurative use of the term sets in motion the rhetorical transformation of Eliot's philosophical baggage, as he seeks to overcome the ideological confusion endemic in philosophical thought; a confusion which must terminate in stylistic obscurity. One must be fully aware of this rhetorical dimension if one is not to fall into the very philosophical difficulties Eliot experienced while writing his thesis. This is perhaps the problem of Lewis Freed, whose informed and able account of Eliot's philosophical inclinations in *T. S. Eliot: The Critic as Philosopher* (1979) is so close a re-enactment of Eliot's own philosophical explorations that it fails to offer a useful picture of the relation between the criticism and the philosophy. At the other extreme is Richard Shusterman, who tends to be more narrow and accessible in his scope but tends to change his mind every few years. He begins by considering Eliot as a Bradleyan, then is convinced that the real influence comes from Bertrand Russell, and finally makes Eliot an obvious pragmatist. His *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism* (1988) takes the reader through this journey of allegiances, but does not in the end help us to read the criticism on its own terms. We are, as it were, force-fed a line by the academic philosophers, that the criticism is the product of the philosophy with little hope for dissent. It is precisely this entrapment

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[13] "The Division of Philosophy has accepted your thesis without the least hesitation. Prof Royce regards it as the work of an expert", 'From J. H. Woods, 23 June 1916', *Letters*, p. 142.

which Eliot was fighting in 1916, and we must do the same. The way out for both Eliot and ourselves is rhetoric.

Rhetoric has a provisional character in the first stages of this thesis. I use it to point out a leaning towards a discourse-centred approach in Eliot's literary criticism. To impose a particular rhetorical method from the beginning would be an unjustifiable reading of Eliot's prose style. As we shall see, there is, in fact, only a limited amount of direct references to rhetoric in his early writings, mainly in '"Rhetoric" and Poetic Drama' and, later, in the Clark Lectures. Instead I propose gradually to tease out evidence from his own writings in order to form a definite picture of Eliot's rhetorical methods. The main problem in doing so is that, in his literary criticism, Eliot is interested in poetry, and, thus, has little time for rhetoric. Yet the poetry seems to naturally take him to rhetorical considerations.[14] In fact, the closest Eliot eventually gets to an overall poetic theory is through his interest in Dante's allegorical method, at which point the latent persistence of rhetoric becomes most evident.

Allegory is not only important in determining a rhetorical method of interpretation but becomes a point of thematic synthesis in my argument. Allegory is particularly important in determining the permanence of Eliot's philosophical self-consciousness throughout his career. It is through allegory that he seeks to develop the idea of Philosophical Poets, an idea he borrows from his Harvard teacher George Santayana.[15] Allegory allows Eliot to recycle his philosophical interests to develop a general method of interpretation. The rhetorical struggle between science (or literal) and metaphor (or figurative) initiated in *The Sacred Wood* is eventually fulfilled by his criticism of Dante's allegory. This is a process which eventually reconciles Eliot with the metaphysical philosophy he was trying to leave behind; a return to metaphysics through the physics. There is, from this perspective, a fundamental coherence throughout his literary criticism in which his early scientific bias adopts new forms and can be rescued through re-reading. *The Sacred Wood*'s stress on a literal, empirical and conceptual

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[14] It is perhaps symptomatic that Eliot included the essay '"Rhetoric" and Poetic Drama' in *The Sacred Wood*, where he tries to redeem the term within the poetic context of the blank verse.

[15] George Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1910).

exactitude remains, but imports into its mechanisms further levels of understanding in the light of later criticism. The metaphoric and metaphysical implied in Eliot's early literary criticism can finally be acknowledged. This amounts to a historicism about his own critical development, where the passing of time does not leave behind the most daring of his poetic theories or critical positions. It opens up a synchronic dimension where his criticism can be reinterpreted while maintaining a faithfulness to what Eliot meant when he stated it. This historicism, which may be said to fulfil his own 'historical sense', will be seen to fit into the allegorical tradition of figural prophecy.

This approach to Eliot's criticism is new insofar as it tries to uncover the workings of his prose style, while using the content of his writings as a foundation for the conclusion which are drawn – what this thesis offers in the end is a close reading of Eliot's critical writings. This involves the application of his statements about poetry to the critical writings themselves. I am not trying to suggest that all discourse can be analyzed in poetic terms, but, on the contrary, that the poetic must be subsumed under a wider bracket of hermeneutics. This Eliot explicitly identifies as the allegorical method in the particular context of Dante's poetry, and adapts it for his purposes as a form of rhetoric. It is only rarely that Eliot's criticism receives this sort of attention, perhaps it is only worth mentioning Edward Lobb's *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition* (1981) and John Paul Riquelme's *Harmony of Dissonance: T. S. Eliot, Romanticism, and Imagination* (1991). Lobb dedicates a whole chapter to Eliot's critical style entitled 'Eliot as Rhetorician'. Yet, his only interest in analyzing Eliot's critical style is from the point of view of technique to prove his participation in the Romantic tradition. In the end, Lobb gives us an image of Eliot as a skilful manipulator of language and of the critical argument, but little more. He fails to address Eliot's intellectual motivation and tensions about what he was trying to say and how he said it. In short Lobb analyzes Eliot's rhetoric as if it were poetry. On the other hand, Riquelme does well to address the possibility of using the allegorical model for purposes similar to mine, yet he does not seem to understand allegory in the medieval context and appropriates it to suggest 'deconstruction'. This kind of approach fails to read Eliot's criticism with enough attention to detail, and precisely in a way that confirms the

deconstructive method of Mr. Riquelme, that is, that Eliot's style is allegorical because its interpretation encourages a fluidity which refuses closure. Lobb too is keen to find a virtue in the apparent lack of a system in Eliot's criticism, and takes refuge in the latter's charming way with words. It is as if Lobb is saying that he is not quite sure what Eliot means but that *that* is the beauty of it because, hey, he is a great mimic, shows a great sense of irony and uses metaphors in unexpected ways. Riquelme, for his part, misses the coherence of Eliot's literary criticism precisely at the point where he denies his style the philosophical background which Eliot comes to see in Dante's allegorical method. Riquelme's main mistake lies in his neglect of Eliot's philosophical studies, which initiate his allegorical journey from physics to metaphysics, the very journey this thesis proposes to encompass.

Chapter 1

Science and the Style of Philosophy

This chapter considers Eliot's choice to remain in England shortly before completing his doctoral thesis while visiting Oxford on a Sheldon Travelling Fellowship between 1914-15. This choice has important consequences in the development of Eliot's career; it amounts to the apparent rejection of philosophy just when it seemed his natural career option. I will consider a number of explanations for this decision: whether it amounts to a general disenchantment with philosophy or a particular rejection of the puritanical philosophical environment at Harvard.

One can explain Eliot's interest in literary criticism as an experiment in philosophical discourse, and as a way of marrying his literary and philosophical interests in ways which the philosophical environment at Harvard would not have allowed for. However, Eliot turns much of his early literary criticism into a critique of metaphysics which, for him, undermines philosophy as a whole. Just as he criticises its discourse he initiates a process of definition which involves both his interests and the development of a critical voice of his own. Eliot's criticism borrows as much as it rejects elements from philosophy. He rejects the metaphysics and borrows the science, which offers Eliot a stylistic model from which to draw in the development of his critical style. More importantly science provides the theoretical perspective to criticise metaphysics, but which ultimately – and this is my argument – will enable the regeneration of the latter. His adoption and development of a logical style reflect Eliot's stylistic bias in his dealings with philosophy as science in the 1910s. I will consider in this chapter the extent of Eliot's manipulation of logic for his own critical purposes, and argue its subversion by becoming a rhetorical tool which re-defines the original scientific status of logical arguments. More importantly, I will consider the cognitive grounding on which logic is rooted: whether it is empirical or latently metaphysical.

Marriage, Literature and Philosophy

Towards the end of the 1910s Eliot had made rapid progress in the world of letters. This was achieved through the compulsive production of whatever reviews Eliot could get into magazines. The compulsion was partly financial necessity as well as the need to make a name for himself in the English literary world. These two are in turn the consequence of Eliot's marriage to Vivienne Haigh-Wood on the 26th of June 1915 and his decision to stay in England to become a literary man. Thus Eliot unexpectedly drops Philosophy as a vocation. He had written to Professor James H. Woods[16] only a month before his marriage with the intention of returning to Harvard or, at the very least, of continuing his philosophy studies at Merton College, Oxford, where he was about to complete his doctoral thesis on Francis Herbert Bradley and Alexus von Meinong.[17] Eliot wote:

> I hope you will let me know about next year, because if I do not have a re-appointment, financial conditions make it desirable for me to get as much assistant's work at Harvard as I can adequately perform in addition to my own affairs – in case there is room for me. I certainly should not resign in the middle of the year.[18]

Eliot is requesting the assistantship he held before leaving Harvard for Europe in 1914 in case the "re-appointment" to his Sheldon Travelling Fellowship – which was keeping him at Oxford – fell through. The next entry after Eliot's letter to Prof. Woods of the 6th May in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, notes his marriage to Vivienne[19]. He did in fact get his Fellowship renewed, but turned it down as well as the assistantship by choosing to stay in England.[20] One can only deduce that Eliot was predisposed to stay in England whether he got the assistantship or not, the marriage being the means to make this stay inevitable. The re-appointment to the Sheldon Travelling Fellowship may not have been as decisive as Eliot implies in his letter to Prof.

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16 Professor James Woods (1864-1935) taught Eliot Indian philosophy at Harvard where he was Professor of Philosophy at Harvard between 1913-34. He had joined the department as an instructor in Indian philosophy in 1903. TSE recorded that 'a year in the mazes of patanjali's metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods left me in a state of enlightened mystification' (*After Strange Gods*, 1934, p. 40).

17 The original title of Eliot's doctoral thesis puts as much emphasis on Bradley as on Meinong: 'Meinong's *Gegenstandstheorie* Considered in Relation to Bradley's Theory of Knowledge'. A later version drops Meinong from the title: 'Experience and the Objects of Knowledge in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley'.

18 'To J. H. Woods, 6th May [1915]', *Letters*, p. 98.

19 "On the 26th June TSE married Vivienne Haigh Haigh-Wood at Hampstead Registry Office in the presence of Lucy Ely Thayer (her close friend, cousin of Scofield) and Lilia C. Symes, Vivienne's aunt. Their ages are given as twenty-six, although she had just turned twenty-seven. TSE is recorded as 'of no occupation' and living at 35 Greek Street, Soho. His father is described as a 'Brick Manufacturer' and Vivienne's father as an 'Artist (Painter)'. Their respective fathers knew nothing of the wedding beforehand", *Letters*, pp. 98-99.

20 *Letters*, 'To J. H. Woods, 10th July 1915', p. 108.

Woods. In fact, Eliot never liked Oxford very much and had always preferred London.[21] His marriage to Vivienne settled his indecision.

This interpretation is now commonplace among Eliot scholars. Peter Ackroyd's biography clearly states that Eliot felt under pressure to achieve great things from his family; that though Eliot

> was protected every step of the way and although his family expected great things of him, these were to be attained only within the confines which they understood. It is a familiar story and the imperative is familiar also: to get out.[22]

Eliot had already made his first escape from New England in 1910, the year of his graduation for his A. B. in English Literature. He went to Paris to attend Henri Bergson's Lectures at the Collège de France. Now he was to make his escape good, but surely at the price of a half-hearted marriage. The effectiveness of this escape, however, is testified by his eventual success as poet and critic, just as it is true that Vivienne had her own ideas when she married Eliot and fought hard to keep him in England as she was to tell Richard Aldington in 1922.[23] Eliot's correspondence with his mother during this period shows no evidence of the marriage being a problem; the principal debate is over his decision not to pursue an academic career. The number of attempts on the part of Eliot's parents to redirect him back on the academic track illustrates this priority. Charlotte C. Eliot's hopes and fears are set out in a letter to Bertrand Russell in which she encourages the philosopher to intercede over Eliot's decision on her behalf:

> I am sure your influence in every way will confirm my son in his choice of philosophy as his life work. Professor Woods speaks of his thesis as being of exceptional value. I had hoped he would seek a University appointment next year. If he does not I should feel regret. I have absolute faith in his Philosophy but not in the vers libre.[24]

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21 "I do not know my own plans for the future. Day before yesterday came a telegram from Harvard, notifying me of my renomination to my fellowship. But I do not know what I should do with it if I had it. Oxford I do not enjoy: the food and the climate are execrable, I suffer indigestion, constipation, and colds constantly; and the university atmosphere. If I could be allowed to stay in London and work at the Museum I should be content; but the War suffocates me, and I do not think that I should ever come to like England [. . .] On the other hand I dread returning to Cambridge", To Conrad Aiken, 25 February [1915], *Letters*, p. 88.

22 Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 39.

23 "I am English, and once I liked England – once I fought like mad to keep Tom here and stopped his going back to America. I thought I could not marry him unless I was able to keep him here, in England", 'Vivienne Eliot to Richard Aldington, 15? July 1922', *Letters*, p. 544.

24 'Charlotte C. Eliot to Bertrand Russell, 23 May 1916', *Letters*, p. 139.

It is curious that Charlotte does not attempt a direct appeal to his son, but seeks the indirect influence of philosophers such as Russell or Woods himself; indeed it was through Russell in particular that offers of academic and journalistic work came to Eliot. The result is that, far from fulfilling his literary interest from the beginning of his career, Eliot finds himself compromising. His first publications are not in literary magazines, but in philosophy journals; namely the *Monist* and the *International Journal of Ethics*, most of which are book reviews. Thus Eliot makes a quick start in the English world of letters at the expense, perhaps, of deferring his literary aspirations.

From 'Three Poems', published in *Poetry* (vii. 1) in October 1915 three months after his marriage, Eliot's publications turn almost exclusively philosophical till the publication of 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' in March 1917. At this time he becomes the assistant editor of the *Egoist*, replacing Richard Aldington who had enlisted, and his philosophical output increases precisely at the stage he had intended to have given it up. Charlotte's effort to maintain Eliot directed towards philosophy had materialized into giving her son the opportunity to publish with the help of Russell. However, Eliot kept on with his poetry; he published 'Observation' in *Poetry* (September 1916) which includes the poems: 'Conversation Galante', 'La Figlia Che Piange', 'Mr Apollinax' and 'Morning at the Window'; also the dramatic satire 'Eeldrop and Appleplex, I' in *The Little Review* (May 1917), where he also published 'Four Poems' in July. Equally, his reviewing for the *New Statesman*[25] was the only concession to less philosophically technical subjects, yet they still show evidence of Eliot's dependence on the theoretical sciences. Thus, the sheer size of Eliot's strictly philosophical reviews cannot be ignored. Aiken notes that Eliot's encounter with the literary world of 1910s London was secured precisely by the idiosyncrasy of this mixed background:

25 'An American Critic' [A Review of] *Aristocracy and Justice* by Paul Elmer Moore, *New Statesman*, 7, no 168 (June 24, 1916), 284; [A review of] *Group Theories of Religion and the Religion of the Individual* by Clement C. J. Webb, *New Statesman*, 7, no 173, (July 29, 1916), 405-406; [A review of] *Social Adaptation* by L. M. Bristol, *New Statesman*, 7, no 173 (July 29, 1916), 405; 'Mr Leacock Serious' [A review of] *Essays and Literary Studies* by Stephen Leacock, *New Statesman*, 7, no 173 (July 29, 1916), 404-405; 'Giordano Bruno' [A review of] *Giordano Bruno: His Life Thought, and Martyrdom* by William Boulting, *New Statesman*, 8, no 185 (October 21, 1916), 68.

> It would be easy to say that, even after his relatively brief exposure to Poundian London, philosophy began to bore him; but this is unlikely. It remained a bolt-hole for him, a discipline into which he could escape and which could provide him with a career if he wished for one.[26]

Eliot's decision to stay in England is then not conditioned solely by a rejection of philosophy in general. In *T. S. Eliot and American Philosophy*, Manju Jain argues that Eliot disagreed with the particular philosophical climate at Harvard: the mixture of philosophy and politics illustrated by its president Charles Eliot's liberal Unitarianism.[27] And he was not alone in this: the main dissent from Harvard philosophy was George Santayana who, in *The Genteel Tradition*, argued that its philosophical tradition was ultimately traceable to the radical puritanical origins of America. Jain notes that Santayana's

> analysis of the Harvard philosophical ethos makes explicit the connection between the Puritan environment in which Eliot was brought up and which he rejected, and Harvard philosophy with which he was dissatisfied.[28]

Santayana is perhaps the only continuous link with the Harvard philosophy department which Eliot keeps throughout his life. His influence is particularly apparent in the use Eliot makes of Santayana's *Three Philosophical Poets* in *Dante* in 1929 and his Turnbull Lectures in 1933.[29] Yet it is this association which proves fatal for Eliot's philosophical prospects in 1919 – notwithstanding the fact that by this date Eliot had given up the possibility of a return for good. Jain elaborates on an interesting incident at Harvard in which Professor Wood's suggested appointment of Eliot to a post in the philosophy department is rejected. The rejection came from Ralph Barton Perry who wrote to Professor Woods saying:

> If he is a sort of attenuated Santayana, [. . .] in other words if his recent poetry is now the most typical thing about him, I do not believe that he would be the right man to be permanently in charge of students concentrating in philosophy. Our great hope beyond my convictions is in the economic and the political, rather than in the literary applications of philosophy.[30]

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26 Ackroyd, p. 58.

27 This is a point Eliot made in a graduate paper he read for the Harvard Philosophical Club in 1913 entitled 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', originally announced for October 17, 1913, as 'Philosophy and Politics' in the *Harvard University Gazette*, 9 (1913-14).

28 Manju Jain, *T. S. Eliot and American Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 38.

29 Lecture I [Toward a definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Turnbull Lectures, *VMP*, p. 251. Also see 'Philosophical Poetry' in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

30 Jain, p. 35. Jain notes that "Perry's comparison of Eliot and Santayana is a particularly telling one, for they had both rejected the Harvard milieu in which they had been educated for practically the same reasons. And if Santayana, who had resigned from the Harvard philosophy department in 1912, can be considered along with his contemporaries such as Henry James and Henry Adams, for whom the problem of the life of reflection in America could only result in exile and expatriation, or a terrible sense of isolation if they remained in America, this is the historical tradition to which Eliot, too, belongs", Jain, p. 36. Also see a letter from Charles W. Eliot on the 25th of July, 1919, to Eliot: "You mention in your letter the name of Henry James, I knew his father well, and his brother

Perry may have been right, particularly with respect to "the literary applications of philosophy". A few months before his marriage Eliot legitimises his disenchantment with philosophy in the following terms: "For *me* as for Santayana, philosophy is chiefly literary criticism and conversation about life."[31] Given such an affiliation, Eliot made the right choice in staying away from Harvard – an affiliation which was the source of his uneasiness with philosophy in this early period. Santayana had, in fact, resigned from the department in 1912. To a large extent Eliot chooses to stay in England as a way of keeping away from Harvard's philosophical environment which becomes a general unhappiness with a career which refused to accept his literary interests.[32] As Eliot focuses his critique of philosophy through literature he develops a particular concern with the former's discourse, but which, in the end, does not involves its outright rejection. Eliot resorts to philosophy to formulate his early literary theory as much as to redefine the sort of philosophy he is interested in.

Recently, M. R. A. Habib has argued that Eliot's literary project involved philosophy as a strategy which offered a classical re-ordering of the inescapable fragmentation of a Romantic present. He puts it as follows:

> It is precisely to the extent that [George Santayana and Irving Babbitt] were aware of the artifice of their classical enterprise, of its clash with the romantically determined domain of the historically possible, that they called for a combination of the talents of poetry and philosophy: poetry cannot merely 'return' by way of naive imitation to objective classical form but must bear within itself the struggle to redintegrate subjectively the historically dispersed elements of classical vision.[33]

Habib hints at a decreasing poetic autonomy which has to be deliberately compensated for by the philosophical re-construction of a world in which literature can properly sink its roots. More importantly, Habib shows an important insight into the relation between Eliot's poetry and his criticism, deducing that they illustrate a schizophrenic separation of powers between literature

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William very well; and I had some conversation with Henry at different times during his life. I have a vivid remembrance of a talk with him during his last visit to America. It seemed to me all along that his English residence for so many years contributed neither to the happy development of his art nor to his personal happiness", *Letters*, p. 323.

[31] 'To Norbert Wiener, 6 January 1915', *Letters*, p. 81.

[32] In a letter to Conrad Aiken on 25th February 1915 Eliot wrote: "Oxford I do not enjoy [. . .] On the other hand I dread returning to Cambridge [. . .] The great need is to know one's own mind, and I don't know that: whether I want to get married, and have a family, and live in America all my life, and compromise and conceal my opinions and forfeit my independence for the sake of my children's future; or save my money and retire at fifty to a table on the boulevard [. . .] How thin either life seems!", *Letters*, p. 88.

[33] M. R. A. Habib, *The Early T. S. Eliot and Western Philosophy* (Cambridge, CUP, 1999), p. 64.

and philosophy. Where Eliot's criticism is diagnostic, his poetry is symptomatic of Romanticism; such a disjuction between poetry and philosophy seems an unavoidable point of departure for any project of reconstruction. He concludes:

> Just as Eliot's verse *inevitably* 'violates' his own critical opinions, so the influences behind his verse unavoidably incorporate elements from which Eliot recoils in his prose writing.[34]

Habib is referring here to Schopenhauer, a philosopher Eliot openly attacks in his criticism yet cannot *avoid* in his poetry through Jules Laforgue's own debt to this philosopher.[35] Philosophy infiltrates both genres; while his poetry may appear to incorporate the philosophy, the criticism becomes a point of resistance, a resistance symptomatic of a general insecurity with prose even as it desperately attempts to resurrect a tone of authority for its critique of Romanticism. In a sense Eliot's criticism of Romanticism is a way of criticising the very emotional vagaries he wants to exorcise from his own prose style. This is all the more pertinent given that this emotional imprecision is precisely the heritage Eliot felt he had received throughout his philosophical training. It is the prose, rather than the poetry, which, lacking the poetic attention verse enjoyed in the 1910s, required the bigger effort of redefinition. The first step of this redefinition involves the consolidation of stylistic models, which, however, Eliot could only have found in philosophy. Hence, Eliot's dilemma at the beginning of his literary career lies in his being at a loss to distinguish between his disagreement with a particular kind of philosophy from his disenchantment with philosophical discourse in general. Consequently, he resorts to formal logic and science as a means both to imply a rejection of his metaphysical inheritance, while, by staying within the paradigms of philosophy, still salvaging some of it. In the end, Eliot's early literary criticism must be seen as a battle ground of discourses where he experiments with prose style as a means of redefining discourse in criticism.

One of Charlotte Eliot's letters to Bertrand Russell, at the time Eliot had made his decision to quit philosophy, gives an unexpected insight into her son's dilemma:

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[34] Habib, p. 64. This is perhaps most noticeable in Eliot's pre-1917 poetry most of which is compiled under the name 'Reflections of the March Hare'. See Chapter 4, 'The Negative Style of the Dissociation: Dr Johnson's Life of Cowley'.

[35] See Habib, Chapter 3: 'Philosophy and Laughter: Schopenhauer, Laforgue and Bergson', pp. 61-96.

> My personal experience [has] been that the mere reading of Philosophy stimulates the mind and increases its creative power, so that I have sometimes read Philosophy as a preparation for writing. I do not see any reason why if my son makes Philosophy his life work he should not write all the poetry he desires, if not too much of the ephemeral 'vers libre'. I went yesterday to the library, to look for Tom's review in the *International Journal of Ethics*. I found and read it. It produced an excellent impression but I am too ignorant to understand and appreciate the article. I feel very grateful to you for having obtained for Tom the opportunity to do this work, and am very glad he is to join the Aristotelian Society. I saw in the *Fortnightly Review* an article by Ezra Pound, in which he mentions Tom as one of the most intelligent writers [. . .] Yet I cannot read Pound. His articles seem over-strained, unnatural.[36]

Charlotte Eliot is sensitive to the compatibility of philosophy and literary style, though perhaps only as a way of reconciling Eliot's desires with her own. Yet the point is genuine: Charlotte is saying more than she intends. Her implication is that philosophy is a precursor of literary activity; a sort of rhetorical mental exercise to prepare for the articulation of poetic thought. She admits that she does not understand and appreciate Eliot's article, but nevertheless likes it; yet she is prepared to dislike Pound's only on stylistic grounds. Thus philosophy is, for Charlotte, subsumed into poetics, perhaps as a way of making her shortcomings in the understanding of philosophy into a virtue. Eliot may not have agreed with his mother about the relationship between poetry and philosophy, yet he finds their relationship useful to point out their deficiencies. Take, for instance Eliot's comment s on Hegel in 'The Perfect Critic':

> Hegel arrived, and if not perhaps the first, he was certainly the most prodigious exponent of emotional systematisation, dealing with his emotions as if they were definite objects which had aroused those emotions.[37]

Here Eliot implies a criticism of the philosopher's style where, however prodigious the philosophical systematisation, it fails to appreciate that its objects are not definite entities but indefinite emotions – *poetic* in this sense – which therefore defy the claims of exactitude of the very systematisation it promotes. He equally disapproves of the sort of poetry which claims to be the illustration of a philosophical mind set. This disapproval was behind his suspicion of manifesto poetics as he made clear in a letter to Ezra Pound in 1915.[38] Eliot is clearly drawing a line between the style of criticism and of poetry, and by so doing is facing the difficult choice of establishing the stylistic paradigm for prose criticism and, ultimately, of philosophical discourse. The most significant part of this process is to determine what philosophy is in the

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36 ' Charlotte C. Eliot to Bertrand Russell, 18 January 1916', *Letters*, p. 131.

37 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 9.

38 "To Ezra Pound, 2 February [1915]', *Letters*, pp. 86-87.

first place. This process of definition is at the heart of Eliot's literary criticism; a question which is implied with obsessive recurrence throughout his career as a critic.[39]

Eliot's rejection of academic philosophy can be interpreted as its formal reduction to style as a first step of definition. This reduction coincides with Charlotte's intuition of the uses of philosophical discipline for the sake of creativity, as well as a practical move by Eliot to recycle his philosophical knowledge by relocating it within his literary interests. Eliot retrospectively noted to Richard Wolheim that the interest of his philosophical background is remarkable only as a stylistic influence, and that the importance of the publication of his thesis and two philosophy articles - 'The Development of Leibniz's Monadism' and 'Leibniz's Monadism and Bradley's Finite Centres' - must be considered in this light alone.[40] Wolheim notes that Eliot "spoke of his early academic philosophising as a 'curiosity of literature', 'a curiosity of biographical interest' . . . and its interest (according to Eliot, that is) in the evidence it furnished about the formation of his prose style."[41]

Vers Libre and the Problem with Philosophy

In 'Francis Herbert Bradley' (1926) Eliot praises the philosopher's importance in terms of the perfection of his *style*:

> Certainly one of the reasons for the power [Bradley] still exerts, as a well as an indubitable claim to permanence, is his great gift of style. It is for his purposes – and his purposes are more varied than it is usually supposed – a perfect style. Its perfection has prevented it from cutting any great figure in prose anthologies and literature manuals, for it is perfectly welded with the matter.[42]

Eliot idealises Bradley's synthesis of form and matter, making this perfection the reason for its being unacknowledged. It is too perfect to be noticed. This comment does not reflect Eliot's frustration with the difficulty he encountered in completing his doctoral thesis and which led to

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[39] This concern is illustrated by Eliot's notes on 'definition' in his graduate philosophical papers, namely, 'Description and Interpretation', Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge. See Chapter 2, 'Description and Interpretation'.

[40] In 1959, on being asked by a researcher for permission to consult his student records at Harvard, T. S. Eliot wrote to the Dean of Harvard University that he saw "no objection to . . . giving him this information, though it seems to me that inquiries of this sort are rather a waste of time", Eliot's Undergraduate Folder, Harvard University Archives, Nathan Marsh Pusey Library.

[41] Richard Wolheim, 'Eliot and F. H. Bradley: An Account' in *Eliot in Perspective: A Symposium*, Graham Martin ed. (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 169.

[42] 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *SE*, p. 407.

his early disappointment with philosophical discourse. Two years earlier, upon Bradley's death, Eliot had been more explicit. In 'A Commentary' for *The Criterion* (October 1924) he wrote:

> Few will ever take pains to study the consummate art of Bradley's style, the finest philosophical style in our language, in which acute intellect and passionate feeling preserve a classic balance: only those who will surrender patient years to the understanding of his meaning. But upon those few, both living and unborn, his writings perform that mysterious and complete operation which transmutes not one department of thought only, but the whole intellectual and emotional tone of their being.[43]

Eliot's eulogy of Bradley's philosophical style alludes to its limited appeal only to "those who will surrender patient years to the understanding of his meaning". More importantly, Eliot's praise hinges on a mysterious transmutation of emotions and intellect which intimates an unknowable *something* about Bradley's style. This ineffable quality, in so far as it may be understood as metaphysical, illustrates Eliot's emphasis on the link between style and the problems of philosophy. These two accounts of Bradley's philosophy illustrate Eliot's ambivalence towards philosophy.

A few months before his marriage Eliot wrote to Norbert Wiener (1894-1964), who was later to be the founder of Cybernetics and Professor of Mathematics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology between 1932-59. In 1914-15 he was using his Sheldon Fellowship to study with Bertrand Russell and G. H. Hardy at Cambridge, having received his Ph.D. from Harvard at the age of sixteen[44]:

> In a sense, of course, all philosophising is a perversion of reality: for, in a sense, no philosophic theory makes any difference to practice. It has no working by which we can test it. It is an attempt to organize the confused and contradictory world of common sense, an attempt which invariably meets with partial failure – and with partial success.[45]

The feeling of disillusion implied in these comments is profound That philosophy has no bearing on ordinary life is perhaps the gravest criticism one can make of the discipline. Yet Eliot is conditioned by his reader, who in this case – Norbert Wiener – is a serious student of analytic philosophy and disciple of Bertrand Russell. Eliot, himself an aesthetic philosopher in comparison to the scientific rigour of Wiener, is criticizing philosophy in a way that agrees with the latter's approach. Eliot adds: "I am quite ready to admit that the lesson of relativism is:

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[43] *The Criterion*, 3, no 9 (October 1924), p. 2.

[44] *Letters*, n3, p. 66.

[45] 'To Norbert Wiener, 6 January 1915', *Letters*, p. 80.

to avoid philosophy and devote oneself to either *real* art or *real* science. (For philosophy is an unloved guest in either company)."[46] He is not so much calling for the end of philosophy as prescribing its scope to either a hard science or no science at all. Eliot adds:

> Still, this would be to draw a sharp line, and relativism preaches compromise. For *me*, as for Santayana, philosophy is chiefly literary criticism and conversation about life; and you have the logic, which seems to me of great value. The only reason why relativism does not do away with philosophy altogether, after all, is that there is no such thing to abolish! There is art, and there is science. [47]

Eliot concludes that the term philosophy may be misleading: there is either science, or there is 'literary criticism' and conversation. Eliot's re-definition of philosophy lends itself most radically to an affirmation of the non-existence of the term under revision; philosophy is posited as an abstraction whose existence can only be articulated as a non-entity. In so doing Eliot is paradoxically establishing the metaphysical scope of philosophy. The effect of this negative articulation is to define philosophy in terms of metaphysical ineffability, rather than rendering the term meaningless. Eliot is not simply rejecting philosophy but conditioning its status, as he admits soon after: "of course one cannot avoid metaphysics altogether, because nowhere can a sharp line be drawn – to draw a sharp line between metaphysics and common sense would itself be metaphysics and not common sense."[48] Philosophy is an inescapable metaphysical inference operative in the arts and sciences: "And there are works of art, and perhaps of science, which would never have occurred had not many people been under the impression that there was philosophy."[49]

Eliot's conclusion is indeed relativist, and undermines the very faith that it preaches because it refers to philosophy as an unverified *a priori* in whose existence there is no reason to believe, other than as it pragmatically provides a ground for science and the arts. The important dimension of Eliot's argument is that, in the end, he neutralizes relativism by positing philosophy outside its scope; because it does not exist, philosophy cannot be abolished, which is a kind of affirmation. This rhetorical flourish, however, cannot completely make up for the emptiness of the assertion. The disillusionment is clearly that of an Eliot struggling to make

[46] 'To Norbert Wiener, 6 January 1915', *Letters*, p. 81.
[47] 'To Norbert Wiener, 6 January 1915', *Letters*, p. 81.
[48] 'To Norbert Wiener, 6 January 1915', *Letters*, p. 80.
[49] 'To Norbert Wiener, 6 January 1915', *Letters*, p. 81.

some sense of the self-conscious idealism of F. H. Bradley, which in his doctoral thesis led him to conclude that:

> A philosophy can and must be worked out with the greatest rigour and discipline in the details, but can ultimately be founded on nothing but faith: and this is the reason, I suspect, why the novelties of philosophy are only in elaboration, and never in fundamentals.[50]

This is an important concession to the inescapability of metaphysics in his doctoral thesis, but which in his criticism becomes an important concern; a concern, that is, with the possibility of metaphysical articulation or else the ultimate ineffability of all discourse.[51]

In 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' written for *New Statesman* (March 3rd, 1917) Eliot states:

> It is assumed that vers libre exists. It is assumed that *vers libre* is a school; that it consists of certain theories; that its group or groups of theorists will either revolutionise or demoralise poetry if their attack upon the iambic pentameter meets with any success. *Vers libre* does not exist.[52]

This time, Eliot first poses a hypothesis which it immediately negates in order to eventually – as we will see – posit; a process or argumentation that in his letter to Wiener appears only in an embryonic form. Eliot's negative reasoning is ultimately paying homage to Bradley who in his *Principles of Logic,* states that: "Unless you have a meaning and an idea . . . you deny nothing; since an idea is needed for denial, since a meaningless idea is none."[53] Yet this homage is undercut by the ultimate uncertainty of negative judgement: though "every negation must have a ground, and this ground is positive [. . .] The ground is unstated and it is unknown."[54] Despite this problem, Bradley encourages the reader "to get as clear an idea as we can of the positive ground our denial rests on."[55] This demand is problematic because it depends on a theory of knowledge which does not necessarily make this ground readily available in the first

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50 *KE*, p. 163.

51 This struggle parallels Eliot's statement in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that "art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same", ('Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 51). Here art is the metaphysical inference of all literary productions. This metaphysical inference is precisely the *a priori* Eliot is at pains to articulate through the term 'tradition' in this essay, by considering it, not as an ineffable *a priori*, but as an ideal sedimentation of works of art through history. However the rhetorical strategies at work in his letter to Wiener are more clearly apparent in an earlier essay in literary criticism: 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' (1917).

52 ' Reflections on *Vers Libre*', *SP*, p. 31.

53 F. H. Bradley, Essay VI: 'The Negative Judgement' in *Principles of Logic* (1883), 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), II, 285-667 (p. 665).

54 Bradley, Chapter III: 'The Negative Judgement', *Principles*, I, 114-125 (p. 117).

55 Bradley, Chapter III: 'The Negative Judgement', *Principles*, I, p. 125.

place. In fact, it is the denying which is itself utilized by Bradley as the medium to uncover this positive ground. And this is precisely the problem with Bradleyan metaphysics that Eliot struggles with in his article on *Vers Libre.* This struggle is evident in that in this article Eliot uses Bertrand Russell – increasingly antithetical to Bradley – as a parallel point of departure; his dismissive "*vers libre* does not exist" is also inspired by Russell's Law of Contradiction which finds that any denoting phrase which involves a contradiction has an empty referent; hence it does not exist. As Richard Shusterman notes: "In 'Reflection on *Vers Libre*' Eliot cleverly employs reductive analysis to argue the notion that *vers libre* is merely an empty *battlecry* and that there really is no such thing as free verse."[56]

In 'Reflection on *Vers Libre*' Eliot begins by invoking the presence of *vers libre* through negation while he could be said to be putting the term under logical scrutiny:

> If *vers libre* is a genuine verse-form it will have a positive definition. And I can define it only by negatives: (1) absence of pattern, (2) absence of rhyme, (3) absence of metre.[57]

Verse by definition must abide by a number of rules which the alleged freedom simply contradicts. In this context then the term *vers libre* seems an impossible term, yet a term which retains a validity:

> The decay of intricate formal patterns has nothing to do with the advent of *vers libre.* It had set in long before [. . .] And as for *vers libre*, we conclude that it is not to be defined by absence of pattern or absence of rhyme, for other verse is without these; that it is not defined by non-existence of metre, since even the *worst* verse can be scanned.[58]

Eliot is, as he proceeds, not so much querying the existence of *vers libre*, as trying to find out what verse really is insofar as an idea of freedom can be attached to it. He is taking on a logical approach which reduces ontological questions to an epistemological concern about the logical rigour of denoting phrases, a rigour which inevitably concerns itself with terminology. In the case of *vers libre* Eliot devotes himself to exposing how far it is a contradiction in terms. Hence, 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' seems a desperate attempt to rescue the epistemological

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56 Shusterman, Richard, 'Eliot and Logical Atomism', *ELH*, Vol. 49. Issue 1 (Spring, 1982), 164-178 (p. 169). Shusterman is, however, more interested in using this conection with Russell as a way of proving that at this stage Eliot was totally under the spell of this philosopher: "However, the connections that have been drawn betwen Eliot's Bradleyan philosophy and his early criticism are not so striking as to convince me that this philosophy was a major influence on the criticism", p. 164.

57 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*', *SP*, p. 32.

58 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*', *SP*, p. 36.

validity of discourse by appealing to the hard science of analytic philosophy in the absence of non-scientific routes to certainty. But it is not quite that, for it subverts the scientific absoluteness of Russell's logic which Eliot uses to open his article. The answer lies in Eliot's conviction that

> the ghost of some simple metre should lurk behind the arras in even the 'freest' verse; to advance menacingly as we doze, and withdraw as we rouse. Or, freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation.[59]

The meaningfulness of the term depends on the redefinition of 'freedom' and 'metre'. Logically 'free verse' cannot exist because it is a contradiction in terms: to be so verse would simply stop being verse, yet 'freedom' is itself revealed as dependent on *limitation*. Thus Eliot manages to attribute to *vers libre* a degree of reality; the degree of involving the metaphysical inference of freedom which is not empirically verifiable because it depends on the ghost of a lurking metre. In turn metre reveals its own empirical limitations, as metre itself becomes a metaphysical inference of absolute empiricism never totally fulfilled in practice. It is a ghost, and more interestingly, which alludes to Polonius, who Hamlet kills after noticing him hiding behind the arras. Polonius, the ultimate rhetorician and spin-doctor of the court, is re-interpreted by Eliot as a premonition of insubstantiality – as already empty –, which here allegorizes metre. The existence of metre is never totally fulfilled by verse, anymore than verse ever totally escapes from it. Ultimately, Eliot falls short of condemning *vers libre* to non-existence, but concludes instead: "the division between Conservative Verse and *vers libre* does not exist, for there is only good verse, bad verse, and chaos."[60]

At this point we could turn Eliot's analysis of *vers libre* over to the article that does the analyzing. The adoption of Russell's logic in 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' is itself the ghost of a metre which Eliot's critical rhetoric adopts but never totally fulfils. It might seem so, but is not an absolute surrender to logical rigour. Eliot adopts logic as a stylistic prop which, while flaunting the absence of an absolute referent for *vers libre*, manages to create the illusion of rhetorical inevitability about the more or less attenuated existence of the term. This

[59] 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*', *SP*, pp. 34-5.

[60] 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*', *SP*, p. 36.

appropriation of a logical appearance compensates for the vague metaphysics of the negative method of Bradley without rejecting it in practice.

'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' allegorizes Eliot's concern over the ontological status of philosophy as an inferred metaphysics. Judgement is a matter of style precisely at the point where ontology becomes an epistemological question of scientific and logical rigour; at the point where verse becomes a technical question about the measure of metre. Yet, in 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*', the logical style is limited to the fact that in answering the question about the existence of *vers libre* one must admit that metre is as much an inference as is actual poetic freedom. Just as metre haunts the poet, so metaphysics haunt the philosopher in the form of the absolute; something which cannot be positively uttered or fulfilled in practice. This is an unsatisfactory state of affairs for Eliot, which he expressed to Norbert Wiener thus:

> [The Absolute, Reality or Value] does not exist for me, but I cannot say that it does not exist for Mr Bradley. And Mr Bradley may say that the Absolute is implied *for* me *in* my thought - and who is to be the referee?[61]

As Eliot completes his thesis he finds this question unanswerable. Reaching a conclusion which resembles an answer becomes a possibility only within the assumption that there is a referent to validate our judgement. This is a belief which Eliot finds increasingly doubtful. As he tells his mentor at Harvard, J. H. Woods,

> I had great difficulty, even agony, with the first draft [of the doctoral thesis], owing to my attempt to reach a positive conclusion; and so I should like to turn it into a criticism and valuation of the Bradleian metaphysic – for it seems to me that those best qualified for such tasks are those who have held a doctrine and no longer hold it.[62]

This *criticism* and *valuation* becomes a scientific approach based on a scepticism which still retains the ruins of an Absolute, as the belief one no longer holds. This statement amounts to a contradiction which Eliot is only able to resolve at the expense of making dogma a formal excuse to hold on to epistemological certitude, and in this he approximates pragmatic positions. Belief is not a particular set of philosophical dogmas, but simply the act of believing itself. The contents of philosophy become the relative expression of an Absolute which remains an unverifiable and unknowable *donné*, which is thus discarded for the benefit of a scientific world

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61 'To Norbert Wiener, 6 January 1915', *Letters*, p. 80.

62 'To J. H. Woods, 28 January 1915', *Letters*, p. 84.

of observable data. Consequently, philosophical discourse becomes not a problem of content, but solely of logic which Eliot imports into literary criticism as a descriptive approach towards evaluation.

The roots of this development are to be found early in Eliot's postgraduate years. Habib's close reading of Eliot's unpublished philosophical notes and papers shows that his critique of Kant involves a dissatisfaction with the distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena*. This distinction translates as that between form and content, where form takes the status of unknowable *a priori*. That:

> Eliot insists that the distinction between the *a priori* form and *a posteriori* content of experience is quite provisional, which leads him to doubt that 'pure' conception, i.e. the pure form of a concept free from empirical content, is impossible.[63]

Habib is referring to Eliot's 'Report on the Kantian Categories' in *Three Essays on Kant*[64]. Although Eliot argues that there is no absolute distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena* he is unable to articulate the overlap so that by the time Eliot abandons philosophy he does so to adopt a scientific approach which appears to give priority to form over content. He does so, however, by firmly establishing form in the realm of *phenomena*. This shift attempts to avoid Kant's metaphysical dualism which implies the unknowability of *noumena*. In practice, Eliot's resolution does not explain unknowability but artificially enforces a science with the intention of discarding metaphysics from his early literary criticism. It concentrates, instead, on the literary object as a focus of scientific attention. Thus in Eliot's early literary criticism – specially that anthologized in *The Sacred Wood* -, he explicitly declares allegiance to science instead of metaphysics. Here, Eliot criticizes Coleridge for his emotional metaphysics and praises Aristotle for his scientific intellectualism.[65] The relation Eliot sees between emotions and metaphysics establishes the latter's indirect, hence, *deformed*, contact with the senses.

Eliot appears to find refuge in *form* in the late 1910s; refuge from the aforementioned threat of the relativist fallacy, where content may never achieve the *absolute*

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[63] Habib, p. 108.

[64] *Three Essays on Kant* are at the Hayward Bequest, King's College Library, Cambridge.

[65] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 12 & p. 13.

dimension philosophical discourse claims for itself; where philosophical theories are just reactions to other theories, no better no worse, but only increasingly obscure. Eliot includes an implicit criticism of any theory of content in contemporary literary movements, like Imagism or Vorticism, as he makes quite clear in 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*':

> But I am not here concerned with imagism, which is a theory about the use of material; I am only concerned with the theory of the verse-form in which imagism is cast.[66]

Eliot is suspicious of thematic claims of theories, where *theme* refers to specific thought content. This is, for him, the worst kind of philosophy: not only vague and unscientific, but plainly wrong by falling prey to relativism. Aesthetics should not be mixed with thematics – including morality[67] -, it becomes reductive, and thus limits the disinterested encounter with the object. This is Eliot's view in this early critical stage: an aestheticism that is profoundly suspicious of thematic thought-systems and which he generally identifies with the problems of philosophical discourse. Consider Eliot's comments on Vorticism in a letter to Ezra Pound in 1915:

> I distrust and detest aesthetics, when it cuts loose from the Object, and vapours in the void, but you have not done that. The closer one keeps to the Artist's discussion of his technique the better, I think, and the only kind of art worth talking about is the art one happens to like. There can be no contemplative or easy chair aesthetics, I think; only the aesthetics of the person who is about to do something. I was fearful lest you should hitch up to Bergson or James or some philosopher, and was relieved to find that Vorticism was not a philosophy.[68]

The irony is that Eliot is proposing the sciences of pragmatic method as aesthetic model – to engage with what one naturally does, practically and non-contemplatively by *the person who is about to do something* – at the same time as he is criticising William James.[69] Eliot reveals his former philosophical allegiances at the very point he is fighting to exorcise himself from them.

Literary Criticism and Scientific Rigour

By 1917, Eliot had known Russell's work for quite a few years. As early as 1912, he came into contact with the realist movement as the book , *New Realism,* arrived at Harvard. In this book

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66 'Reflections on *Vers Libre'*, *SP*, p. 32.

67 "The Spoon River Anthology is not material of the first intensity; it is reflective, not immediate; its author is a moralist, rather than an observer", 'Reflections on *Vers Libre'*, *SP*, p. 35.

68 'To Ezra Pound, 2 February [1915], *Letters*, pp. 86-87.

69 For Eliot as a pragmatist see Richard Shusterman, *T.S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism* (London: Duckworth, 1988), Chapter 8: 'Pragmatism and Practical Wisdom', pp. 192-221.

the six co-authors stressed the pre-eminence of science broadly in agreement with Bertrand Russell and other Cambridge philosophers. Later in the spring of 1914, just before leaving for Germany and England, Eliot was taught symbolic logic by Russell who was at Harvard as a visiting professor. Eliot noted in 'A Commentary' for *The Criterion* in 1927 that "the *Principia Mathematica* is perhaps a greater contribution to our language than they are to mathematics". This comment indicates that Eliot had a clear agenda about the uses he was putting science to, but which do not necessarily coincide with the scientific expectations of the neo-realists. By 1935 Eliot retrospectively noted:

> The Six Realists were unteutonised and on the whole anti-religious which was refreshing; they were ascetically, even gloomily, scientific; and they professed considerable admiration for Russell and his Cambridge friends. All this was to the good; but it must be admitted that New Realism, like most pre-war philosophies, seems now as demoded as ladies' hats of the same period. [70]

This statement downgrades the influence scientific philosophy had in Eliot's early criticism to one of transition and provisionality. Though it was perceived at the time as a fresh break from the dense philosophical writings of Kant, Hegel or Schopenhauer, Eliot clearly chose the latter by travelling to Germany in 1914. This is not to underestimate the impact of New Realism on Eliot's critical development. As Richard Shusterman points out, there is a definite scientific slant in the criticism of Eliot in the late 1910s: he claims that since Eliot was

> seeking cognitive respectability and, believing then that science was the unquestioned paradigm of knowledge, he sometimes went so far as to link criticism to science.[71]

Bertrand Russell appears to have fulfilled Eliot's need for linguistic rigour in criticism. Analytic philosophy was not only claiming to be a hard science, but to promote a critical concern with language.[72] In *Logical Atomism* Russell promotes an anti-monistic science where truth is revealed through logical analysis and the assumption of a referential theory of language; though – importantly as will become apparent below – not with reference to objects themselves, but to the atomic structure of the empirical world. Therefore, according to Shusterman, Eliot's interest in Russell during this period must be see in the light of his interest in science as a

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[70] 'Views and Reviews', *The New English Weekly*, 7, no 8 (6th June 1935), p. 151.

[71] Shusterman, *Philosophy of Criticism*, p. 204.

[72] "Closely connected with logical atomism's doctrine of analysis as the major tool of philosophical inquiry stands the doctrine that a major obstacle to philosophical progress is the misleading nature of language and the philosopher's misunderstanding of it", Shusterman, *Philosophy of Criticism*, p. 24.

model of discourse to compensate for the metaphysical imprecision he had laboured with during the writing of his doctoral thesis.

As we noted above, Eliot's 'Reflections on '*Vers Libre*' appears to mimic Russell's logical analysis, but how far this mimicking is a *stylistic* experiment is what has to be made clear. Shusterman again gives a compelling account of Russell's method of analysis which he compares to Eliot's essay:

> Russell employed two different types of analysis. Reductive analysis aimed at getting to the metaphysically basic by reducing certain alleged entries to non-existence, for example, by showing them to be merely logical constructions or logical fictions [. . .] But there was also analysis which aimed simply at elucidating concepts and propositions into a more precise and less misleading form (as in Russell's theory of descriptions). Eliot used both these forms of analysis. His critique that "*verse libre* does not exist" is based on an incisive reductive analysis which shows it to be an empty battle-cry or logical fiction.[73]

The comparison is fair, yet it overlooks Eliot's manipulation of the logical method which in the end, as we have noted, does not automatically reveal *vers libre* as empty battle-cry and logical fiction. This view would be inconsistent with Eliot's critique of Russell's logical methods in his doctoral thesis. In his thesis Eliot is unhappy with the epistemological claims behind Russell's systematic philosophy; logic's claim to distinguish reality from fiction absolutely. In Chapter V of his doctoral thesis, 'The Epistemologist Theory of Knowledge (continued)', Eliot argues against Russell's theory of contradiction in order to undermine its latent linguistic referentiality: "The question is, in the words of Mr Russell, whether 'any grammatically correct denoting phrase stands for an object.'"[74] Eliot suspects that there is a simple relation between words and objects - i.e., "without words, no objects."[75] Yet he is not convinced that the truth of logical constructions alone distinguishes reality from fiction, because reality is not purely empirical: epistemology alone cannot solve ontological problems.

In 'The Epistemologist Theory of Knowledge (continued)' Eliot tries to find a *via media* between the logical atomism of Russell and the latent idealism of the phenomenology of

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[73] Richard Shusterman, 'Eliot as Philosopher' in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*, A. David Moody ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 36. Eliot's 'The Borderline of Prose', *New Statesman*, 9 (May 19, 1917), complains, not so much that *Vers Libre* does not exist but that "[Richard Aldington] has done interesting work in what is unfairly called *vers libre* ", p. 158.

[74] Bertrand Russell, 'On Denoting', *Mind*, 14 (1905), p. 482.

[75] *KE*, p. 132.

Alexus Meinong who promotes, instead, the ontological autonomy of objects. For the latter, there was no absolute difference between real and unreal objects in the sense that unreal objects may be said to hold common properties. Eliot adds:

> The difficulty of Meinong's theory that there are unreal objects is, as Mr Russell points out, the fact that such objects violate the law of contradiction; and the difficulty of Mr Russell's theory is the contradiction of denoting phrases which yet denote nothing – a pure mystery. The position of Meinong is untenable, I think, only so long as we assume that although objects may exist in various ways, they can exist only in one degree.[76]

Eliot is attracted by Meinong's idea that objects are fundamentally intentional and that by virtue of being a complex of existing properties the unreal object can always claim ontological status. This view of the object world, Eliot objects, is not compatible with the idea that objects exist only in one degree, that is, Russell's strict logic which concludes that a denoting phrase may denote nothing. Eliot considers this position counter-intuitive:

> In logic, perhaps, but not in metaphysics, a denoting phrase may denote nothing. Somehow, obscurely, the object denoted is acknowledged existence. It is non-existent according to the practical standards which recognize no degrees between existence and non-existence; but for metaphysics, it cannot be denied practical reality without being admitted to some more attenuated but (if you like) equally real reality.[77]

Without getting into the debate of science versus metaphysics just yet, it is worth noting that Eliot is here sensitive to both modes of expression, or styles. He is in fact attempting some form of reconciliation. Eliot is again referring to the theory of degrees of reality, where Bradley attempted to attenuate the idealism in his philosophy, and more radically expressed in this case by Meinong's theory of objects. It implies that the ontological status of an object may be satisfactorily settled by referring to the relation it establishes with the observer or its denotation. This relation need not be absolute. This uneasy compromise, which involves a re-definition of the referential theory of language, is cognitively accounted for by Eliot in the following terms:

> Objects exist for us in two ways: As we *intend* an object, the intended object is so far real, and as we experience an object, it realises itself, and comes to require a certain degree of fullness of relations before it can call itself an object.[78]

The autonomy of the objective world is dependent on the observer's intentionality – cognitive and linguistic -, yet remains autonomous nonetheless. Thus the solipsistic consequences of subjective idealism are controlled while the individual's participation in the world is assured.

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[76] *KE*, p. 130.
[77] *KE*, p. 128.
[78] *KE*, p. 130.

Eliot's incorporation of Russell's logical method in 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' transgresses, but does not overthrow its scientific method. Eliot applies the lesson he is trying to teach about *vers libre* to himself, as he had already pointed out in his thesis: "We may say, then, that the unreal object, although it exists, does not violate the law of contradiction."[79] The reluctance to overthrow the logical paradigm outright and his own insecurities about Bradley becomes apparent in the ambiguous wording. Why does he not say *because* it exists – rather than *although* – it does not violate the law of contradiction, or simply that its degree of existence disproves the efficacy of the law of contradiction?

Vers Libre is a contradiction in terms. Yet there is a *degree* of reality about it, which, in turn, does not break the law of contradiction because, Eliot adds in a footnote: "I am tempted, by the way, to regard as a dead letter a law which cannot be violated."[80] It is precisely this violation of a law which amounts to freedom and validates free verse as a legitimate verse form. So, by saying that *vers libre* does not exist, Eliot transgresses the law of contradiction which the term violates by using that law, not to condemn *vers libre* to non-existence, but, instead, to determine the degree of its existence. The result is a style – in Eliot's criticism – which has only the appearance of logic, yet retains the force of logic's inevitability while making none of the concession to its epistemological straight-jacket.

Science as Style: Eliot and Hulme

In 1920 Eliot brought together some of his early reviews and published them as *The Sacred Wood.* Of these 'The Perfect Critic' sets out the main thematic concern of the collection: "that familiar vague suggestion of the scientific vocabulary which is characteristic of modern writing"[81]. This statement holds a mirror to Eliot's own scientific project in *The Sacred Wood* and demands closer scrutiny.

Eliot's point of departure in 'The Perfect Critic' is the recent affirmation of "a distinguished critic" that "poetry is the most highly organized form of intellectual activity".

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79 *KE*, p. 131.

80 *KE*, p. 131.

81 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 2.

Eliot wonders: "how is it, for instance, that poetry is more 'highly organized' than astronomy, physics and pure mathematics". He adds that if this phrase is "the highest organization of thought of which contemporary criticism in a distinguished representative, is capable, then, we conclude, modern criticism is degenerate."[82] There is, however, a saving grace, for this type of criticism, however faulty, allows us to ask questions "which Coleridge and Arnold would not have permitted one to ask", yet it sometimes borders on meaninglessness.[83] Eliot later identifies this style as "the abstract style in criticism"[84], which he blames on the philosophic mind set. He adds, however:

> I, of course, do not imply any general condemnation of philosophy; I am, for the moment, using the word 'philosophic' to cover the unscientific ingredients of philosophy.[85]

Eliot is dissatisfied with the way philosophy has been appropriated by other disciplines, which has encouraged the loss of scientific exactitude in criticism, so that "if verbalism were confined to professional philosophers, no harm would be done."[86] This practice involves, for Eliot, a deterioration of language: "words have changed their meanings. What they have lost is definite, and what they have gained is indefinite."[87]

As a way of setting up the boundaries of his approach Eliot turns to the philosophy of perception to redefine the proper relation of words to their objects – the nature of this relation is, in fact, the main theme of his doctoral thesis -, that "not only all knowledge, but all feeling is in perception."[88] Perception is, for Eliot, a crucial point of reference in the development of a theory of cognition used here to resolve the abstraction of the language of criticism and philosophy. For

> there are two ways in which a word may be "abstract". It may have (the word "activity," for example) a meaning which cannot be grasped by appeal to any of the senses; its apprehension may require a deliberate suppression of analogies of visual or muscular experience.[89]

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[82] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 2.

[84] "The phrases by which Arnold is best known may be inadequate, they may assemble more doubt than they dispel, but they usually have more meaning", The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 2.

[85] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 8.

[85] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 8.

[86] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 9.

[87] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 9.

[88] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 10.

[89] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 8.

In fact Eliot would prove true to his word by mining his subsequent criticism with these sort of analogies. The statement in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that "it is in this depersonalisation that art may be said to approach the condition of science"[90] is followed by the well-known analogy of the catalyst. This practice is followed by Eliot's talk of metal alloys, nervous systems and cerebral anaemia in 'Philip Massinger' *in The Sacred Wood* (whose two parts refer to an essay entitled 'Philip Massinger' for the *Times Literary Supplement*, 958 (May 27, 1920) and a review of *Philip Massinger*, by A. H. Cruickshank for *Athenaeum*, 4702 (June 11, 1920)) or digestive systems in 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1922).

There is, however, a latent contradiction here. Just as Eliot warns us about the 'verbal' or 'philosophic' abuse of science, Eliot risks that very linguistic collapse when he encourages the use of scientific language in the form of "analogies of visual or muscular experience" in criticism. Perception is, for Eliot, the scientific model against which one must test critical expression, but what is not so clear is *how* that perception is to be verbalized without becoming, once again, merely abstract; an analogy is potentially akin to abstraction, that is, the substitution of on thing for another, however visual or clear. He concludes in 'The Perfect Critic':

> The inventor of poetry as the most highly organized form of intellectual activity was not engaged in perceiving when he composed this definition.[91]

Part of the answer lies in what Eliot means by 'perception'; for not all perceptions may be scientifically valid.[92] Hence his criticism of the 'aesthetic' or 'impressionistic' critic. This type of critic may be more engaged in perception when he judges than the 'abstract' critic, yet his perception is of the wrong kind; it is more emotional than sensual, personal rather than critical, creative not analytic. Such is Arthur Symons' problem, whose *Studies in Elizabethan Drama* is reviewed in 'The Perfect Critic':

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90 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 53.

91 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 10.

92 That not all perception is scientifically valid lies at the heart of Eliot's attempt to distinguish between 'feelings' and 'emotions' in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

> The point is that you never rest at the pure feeeling; you react in one of two ways, or, as I believe Mr. Symons does, in a mixture of the two ways. The moment you try to put the impressions into words, you either begin to analyse or construct, to "ériger en lois", or you begin to construct something else.[93]

Symons is unable to transform his personal impressions into general laws. He is unable to fulfil Remy de Gourmont's epigram at the beginning of 'The Perfect Critic', which reads: "Eriger en lois ses impressions personelles, c'est le grand effort d'un homme sincère" (*Lettres à 'Amazone*). Symons is not a sincere man, hence, he is a bad critic.

Eliot's interest in science is shared by another important contemporary figure in the English literary scene: T. E. Hulme. It is against the critical practices of this other literary theorist and poet that it may be possible to untangle Eliot's simultaneous, and contradictory, promotion and dismissal of "that familiar vague suggestion of the scientific vocabulary which is characteristic of modern writing". Like Eliot, Hulme's critical thought is greatly influenced by his interest in philosophy. But, unlike Eliot, his knowledge of philosophy was mostly self-taught[94]. He is less academic and more impulsive in his encounter with the philosophical scene of the 1910s. Yet they both followed parallel intellectual developments: Bergson, the German phenomenologists (Husserl and Meinong) and the Anglo-Saxon systematic philosophy of Russell and Moore. Ronald Schuchard is of the opinion that their relationship has been undervalued and that most likely Eliot had met Hulme and derived many of his ideas from the latter.[95] The main link between the two lies not so much in politics as in their reaction to scientific philosophy and Bertrand Russell, which calls for a revision of the impact of Hulme's Classicism on Eliot's thought.

Russell had known of Hulme's philosophical exploits at Cambridge - where he gave papers on Bergson, whose works he later translated into English -, but like Eliot, Hulme's

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93 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 5.

94 Hulme excelled in mathematics at school and attended Cambridge in 1902. He was, however, sent down in 1904 for reasons that still remain obscure and was consequently forced to take up a degree in biology and physics at University College London. He was to give that up too in 1906 and leave for Canada from which he returned in 1908. It is from this point on that Hulme constructed his public persona as a man of letters in London, and where his involvement with Imagism and art theory begins. "Hulme seems to have been very much more interested in the theory of poetry than in poetry itself and probably wrote most of his poems as experiments to illustrate his theories", Alan R. Jones, *The Life and Opinions of T. E. Hulme* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1960) p. 37.

95 See Ronald Schuchard's 'Eliot and Hulme in 1916: Towards a Revaluation of Eliot's Critical and Spiritual Development', *PMLA*, 88, no5 (October 1973), pp. 1083-1094.

initial infatuation with Bergson is tempered by his coming into contact with the new scientific school of philosophy[96]. This scientific interest has its foundations in Hulme's concern with the proper use of language and style. This linguistic concern is already present in his essays on Bergson. In 'Bergson's Theory of Art' Hulme notes:

> As I have said, I do not think that Bergson has invented a new theory . . . but has simply created a much better vocabulary [. . .] The advantage of Bergson's account of the matter is that the expressions he uses are part of a definite conception of reality and not mere metaphors invented specially for the purpose of describing art.[97]

Hulme's praise for Bergson's creation of "a much better vocabulary" refers to the poetic power to resurrect the dead metaphors of prose language. It also parallels Eliot's own admiration for Bradley's 'perfect style'. The problem is that these perfect styles require a *definite conception of reality*, which both Eliot and Hulme supplement with scientific philosophy. This supplementation is complicated by the fact that the conception of reality that a philosophy promotes may not lend itself to the exactitude of scientific style. This scientific factor is what, ideally, reconciles art and philosophy. In 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', also in *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot notes that:

> Every work of imagination must have a philosophy; and every work of philosophy must be a work of art – how often we have heard that M. Bergson is an artist! It is a boast of his disciples. It is what the word 'art' means to them that is the disputable point: much of Aristotle and Plato, Spinoza, parts of Hume. Mr Bradley's *Principles of Logic*, Mr Russell's essay 'On Denoting': clear and beautifully formed thought.[98]

Eliot's stress on the stylistic aspect of philosophy allows him to reconcile a number of philosophers whose *conceptions of reality* may not necessarily be complementary and of whose theories he was not uncritical. As we have already noted, Eliot was critical of Russell's 'On Denoting' in his doctoral thesis and suspicious of Bradley's inability to provide philosophical answers in his metaphysics. Style is Eliot's refuge from his philosophical impasse and from the need to articulate a definite conception of reality by enabling him to translate his disagreement

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[96] "Curiously, however, side by side with his devotion to Bergson there grew up in Hulme a passionate interest in the more scientific and academic philosophies of Husserl, Brentano, Cohen and Moore. Bergson's anti-intellectualism seems to have appealed to his fundamental religious mind; while the philosophies of the new scientific school satisfied his love of mathematical orderlies and scientific objectivity", *The Life and Opinions of T. E. Hulme*, p. 57.

[97] 'Bergson's Theory of Art' in T. E. Hulme, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, Herbert Read ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1924) p. 157 & 169.

[98] 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', *SW*, pp. 66-67. This essay was published simultaneously in *Dial*, 69, (5 November 1920), 441-447.

with the content of philosophy into questions of form and logic, and which in themselves supply the required *definite conception of reality.*

For Hulme scientific philosophy opens the possibility of concentrating on the problems of style and postponing the debate over its consequences as a world-view, which, however, he does not reject outright. He believes it simply belongs to a different intellectual sphere of influence which should not be confused with its form as philosophical expression. In a 'Critique of Satisfaction' Hulme notes:

> While I entirely agree with what [Russell and Husserl] say as to the possibility of a purely *scientific* philosophy and the necessity for a clear separation between that and a *Weltanschauung*, yet [. . .] I must lay emphasis on a different aspect of this separation. They insist on a clear separation, because they wish to free the scientific element in philosophy from the bad influence of the other. They want the *Weltanschauung* separated from philosophy because they think it has often injuriously affected the scientific part of the subject.[99]

Hulme's interest in this separation is a means of keeping the *Weltanschauung* as a separate subject to which one should pay individual attention, but not as a way of doing away with it. This is the main characteristic of his Classicism. It amounts to an absolute separation between science and metaphysics which in Eliot, and from a socio-political point of view, is expressed in his criticism of Arnold's disjunction between society and culture. Here culture is not actualized in society as a whole but paradoxically becomes a substitute for religion with non-metaphysical pretensions, Humanist at that. As Pamela MacCallum puts it:

> Arnold's disjunction of culture from society allows it to usurp the function of religion, thereby disguising the distinction between ethics and religion [. . .] When Arnold relegated religion to ethical culture he collapsed the difference between the two: the vagueness and abstraction in his definition of culture facilitated its substitution for religion.[100]

Hulme is aware that scientific philosophy or empirical critical approaches do not always respect this separation, which too often stray onto the world of ethics unknowingly collapsing the difference between science and metaphysics. Hulme blames this transgression on Humanism, which, unnoticed, attaches its metaphysical leftovers onto scientific approaches. Hulme adds

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99 'A Critique of Satisfaction', *Speculations*, p. 29.

100 Pamela McCallum, *Literature and Method: Towards a critique of I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan Humanities Press, 1983), p. 113. MacCallum is very good at contextualizing the debate between metaphysics and science in the British philosophical tradition of utilitarianism where Eliot's criticism of Arnold – and Bradley's for that matter – must be contextualized. It is the link that latently politicizes the philosophical discourse of Eliot and Hulme of this early period. This latency becomes increasingly apparent in Eliot's critical development.

that pure philosophy should be a natural corrective to the confusing intermingling of science and metaphysics:

> Instead it is, as a matter of fact, an entirely uncritical acceptance of Humanist views of man's nature, and destiny [. . .] The difficulty is exactly parallel to the difficulty the scientific materialists of the last century used to experience in realising that metaphysics was a real region of knowledge.[101]

It is important to note that Hulme is not attacking metaphysics, but empiricism's inability to cope with it face on adopting instead a watered down ethical expression.

Thus Hulme's attack on Russell's philosophy is on ethical grounds: that Russell unfairly deduces a theory of value which does not properly belong to the scientific realm of his philosophy. About Russell's 'A Freeman's Worship', Hulme notes, "you get something perfectly human and arbitrary cloaked in a scientific vocabulary."[102] It is Russell's ethics to which Hulme objects, and not so much to his empirical pursuits in which Hulme sees a model for linguistic exactitude, so that "pure philosophy ought to be, and may be, entirely objective and scientific."[103] In 1916 Eliot was promoting the same dissociation between ethics and scientific rigour, as he wrote in a review for the *International Journal of Ethics*:

> The fact is, no philosophy can render morality either more or less secure than we actually find it to be. A philosophy may advance one or another hypothesis as to the origin of values, it may attempt to show that the majority of mankind are mistaken in what they value. All it can do is to propose an impartial explanation, or to substitute one set of values for another; but show that nothing is valuable it cannot.[104]

Like Hulme, Eliot finds that any attempt to overlook the ethical implications of philosophy is misguided in so far as any philosophy will inevitably involve qualitative discriminations; but that to "show that nothing is valuable it cannot". This is precisely the false premise which allows philosophy to fall into value judgements without admitting the relativist difficulties of so doing; thus passing morality for scientific exactitude. Balfour's pragmatism is for Eliot an example of the misguided attempt to overlook the ethical implications of any philosophy, however scientific. The paradox is that the separation between ethics and sciences can only be properly achieved by not failing to acknowledge this latent metaphysical dimension; it is only

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101 'A Critique of Satisfaction', *Speculations*, p. 18 & 21.

102 'A Critique of Satisfaction', *Speculations*, p. 18.

103 'A Critique of Satisfaction', *Speculations*, p. 18.

104 T.S. Eliot's '[A review of] *Theism and Humanism* by the Rt. Hon. A. J. Balfour, M.P. The Gifford Lectures for 1914', *IJE* , 26, no 2 (January, 1916), 284-9.

through acknowledgement that it can be kept at bay. This is precisely the difficulty of the project of Classicism, whose criticism, however scientific, becomes a self-conscious – if ironic – aesthetic posture impossible to maintain. This aestheticism is perhaps at the root of the scientific *style* Eliot insists on in *The Sacred Wood*, which artificially tries to keep away the very metaphysics he must ultimately take into account. Eliot is in these early days partaking of the Arnoldean malady more than he cares to admit with a straight face. This is the ambiguity and latent irony of Eliot's apparent scientific rigour in 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*', and his proposal in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' "to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism."[105]

Ambivalence towards scientific method is also illustrated by Hulme's fierce criticism of the Humanist danger posed by the scientific philosophy of Russell. Hulme wants to enjoy the science without the ethics; but it is the possibility of the marriage between the two that he hopes for. Hulme later admitted in 'Neo-realism':

> When with entirely empirical and nominalist prejudices, I read Moore and Russell, there was no foothold for me; they dealt with logic and ethics, and holding as I did, entirely relativist views about both, I naturally found nothing familiar from which I might started to understand the rest. The Germans [Husserl and Meinong] I mentioned were useful in this way; they made the intellectualist non-empirical method comprehensible to me by enlarging its scope - applying it not only to logic and ethics but to things which at the time did interest me.[106]

Here Hulme appears to be giving in to the very philosophy he was trying to resist in his earlier pieces on Humanism. Hulme sees an opening in Neo-realism that redeems it from the Humanist fallacy of letting ethics and metaphysics through the back door. This opening is embodied by logic's linguistic concerns. It offers Hulme a realm between nominalism and rationalism, empiricism and metaphysics, where ethics and science can co-exist. Thus the empiricist and nominalist limitation is that it

> cannot understand how the study of such an apparently relative and trivial thing as the nature of propositions, the study of the accidental characteristic s of human speech should be an indispensable preliminary to philosophy.[107]

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[105] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 59.

[106] 'Neo-realism', *Speculations*, p. 41.

[107] 'Neo-realism', *Speculations*, p. 44.

Hulme adds that this linguistic treatment avoids the anthropomorphism of science when it deals with the human, as ethics or the *Weltanschauung*. And thus the romantic monster of personality is kept at bay. Hulme adds:

> One recalls Bolzano's 'Sentences in themselves'. Logic, then, does not deal with the laws of the human thought but with these quite objective sentences. In this way the anthropomorphism which underlies certain views of logic is got rid of. Similarly, ethics can be exhibited as an objective science, and is also purified of anthropomorphism.[108]

Despite Hulme's awareness of the shortcomings of scientific philosophy, he cannot help wishing it were the answer to all his problems. There is a similar temptation in Eliot's early criticism: a self-conscious attempt to root his literary approach in scientific method. Eliot is, however, more cautious about the problems of logic and Russell's empiricism. For him the problem is not simply about keeping worldviews separate from science but to determine how far science can go.

Both in 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama' and 'The Perfect Critic', Eliot considers the relation of science to literature. His awareness of the problems is however superior to Hulme. Eliot's premise is summarized by the statement that

> permanent literature is always a presentation: either a presentation of thought, or a presentation of feeling by a statement of events in human action or objects in the external world.[109]

Eliot's approach is more clearly cognitive where Hulme's bias is more strictly logical. The difference is in their respective understandings of the term 'external'. Eliot understands that the 'external world' is a *donné*, not reducible to the empirical world alone, but one which includes human beings and objects participating in it. This admission potentially re-introduces the importance of the *Weltanschauung*, itself part of the events in human action where *feeling* refers to perception, in the philosophy of language. For Hulme this understanding contaminates the exactitude of philosophy as a science, and by default the precision of its literary correlative: the poetic analogy. For Eliot *thought*, *feelings* and *human action* are as much part of the external world as its physical make up and its essential atomistic structure. In short, Hulme is

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108 'Neo-realism', *Speculations*, pp. 44-5.

109 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', *SW*, pp. 64-65.

more naively enthusiastic about the new sciences than Eliot, whose doctoral thesis gave him an invaluable understanding of the intermingling issues at stake.

Cognition and Hulme's 'Notes on Language and Style'

In 'Notes on Language and Style', Hulme is particularly concerned with the relation of language to its objects. Like Eliot, Hulme struggles to come to terms with a referential theory of language while still accepting the existence of an external reality:

> A man cannot write without seeing at the same time a visual signification before his eyes. It is this image which precedes the writing and makes it firm [. . .] The art of literature consists exactly in this passage from the eye to the voice.[110]

The key to the debate over logic as a stylistic model of language lies in cognition. Here, Eliot's thorough philosophical training gives him an edge over Hulme, an advantage over the latter's rudimentary critique of arithmetical language:

> Clumsiness of Prose - Relation of Language and the Idea Expressed:
>
> Analysis of a man reading an argument.
>
> We replace meaning (i.e. *visions*) by words. These words fall into well-known patterns, i.e. into certain well-known phrases which we accept without thinking of their meaning, just as we do x in algebra.
> [. . .] Habitually we may say that the reader takes words as x without the meaning attached. Aphra sees each word with an image sticking on to it, never a flat word passed over a board like a counter.
> [. . .] The ideal of modern prose is to be all counters, i.e. to pass to conclusions without thinking.[111]

Hulme overstates the problem of arithmetical language because he does not seems aware of the logician's own struggle to include cognitive referentialism in his own theory of language. In 'Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits' (1948) Russell is, in fact, principally concerned with this link:

> Language would be impossible if the physical world did not in fact have certain characteristics and that the 'theory' of language is at certain points dependent upon knowledge of the physical world [. . .] Logic and mathematics would not have prospered as they have done if logicians and mathematicians had continually remembered that symbols should mean something.[112]

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[110] T. E. Hulme's 'Notes on Language and Style', *Further Speculations*, ed. Sam Hynes (Minnesota Press), p 79 & 86. This particular essay is a collection of Hulme's notes on various themes published after his death, thus it is disjointed and abbreviated.

[111] 'Notes on Language and Style', *Further Speculations*, pp. 77, 78 &79.

[112] Bertrand Russell, 'Language' (from 'Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits' (1948)) in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (1903-1959), Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn eds. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), p. 133 & p. 135.

Hulme's awareness of "the fallacy that language is logical, or that meaning is" cannot be properly offered an alternative because he does not seem clear enough about the full cognitive implications of logic in the first place[113]. Hulme is offering a *style* as a solution to avoid "to pass to conclusions without thinking", but never departing from the arithmetical logic he is criticising. This style is based on what Hulme calls *analogy*. Analogy is the poetic expression of the synthesis between perception and language. He notes in 'Notes on Language and Style':

> The two tarts walking along Piccadilly on tiptoe, going home, with hat on back of head. Worry until could find the exact model analogy that will reproduce the extraordinary effect they produce [. . .] We may have evolved painfully from the clay, and be the last leaf on a tree. But now we have cut ourselves away from that. We are things-in-themselves. We exist out of time.[114]

Hulme's concept of analogy gives away the latent idealism he criticizes in algebra. The aim of the analogy is to find a timeless absolute referent in the world for language. It amounts to arithmetical Platonism in literature. His insistence to *see* things, is rather a desire to see *through* them.

Hulme's idealism is restricted to poetics. The referentiality of the analogy has to be distinguished from that of ordinary language. Hulme accepts that this is the status all language arrives at in the end, but sees in poetry the role of reawakening the link between the object and its denotation. In 'Bergson's Theory of Art' he affirms that

> every word in the language originates as a live metaphor, but gradually of course all visual meaning goes out of them and they become a kind of counters. Prose is in fact the museum where the dead metaphors of the poets are preserved.[115]

Once they die, metaphors stop pointing to the world, and only to themselves. What Hulme means by 'visual meaning' is not an exercise in the perception of the ordinary world of objects. The possibility of refreshing the link between language and the world relies in the assumption of ideal essences for every object so that its link with language can be renewed. And, for Hulme, this is the role of poetic analogies. This idealism is, after all, not unlike Russell's concessions to Platonism. It is the necessary compensation for the impossibility of finalising the relationship between language and its objects. Russell's logical atomism attenuates this

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113 'Notes on Language and Style', *Further Speculations*, p. 83.

114 'Notes on Language and Style', *Further Speculations*, p. 82.

115 'Bergson's Theory of Art', *Speculations*, p. 152.

idealism by considering the world as a framework of atomic structures logically structured and which language can reflect; the referent is, thus, not ideal but real.

There is, however, an important reason for Hulme's idealism, it compensates for his increasing awareness that the reality of the object cannot be perceived directly: "could reality come into direct contact with sense and consciousness, art would be useless, or rather we should all be artists."[116] This confirms that Hulme's emphasis on *seeing* is ultimately metaphysical: it is not so much about perceiving as about having visions, as he half acknowledges above: "We replace meaning (i.e. *visions*) by words". For Hulme, poetry is the realm which can "hand you over the sensation as directly as possible, attempts to get it over bodily with all the qualities it possessed for you when you experienced it."[117] Bodily perception is idealized as in Platonic essences which, in the continuous process of being forgotten, can be provisionally reawakened through art and the artist. Hulme notes in 'Bergson's Theory of Art':

> The average person as distinct from the artist does not even perceive the individuality of their own emotions. Our faculties of perception are, as it were, crystallised out into certain moulds. Most of us, then, never see things as they are, but see only the stock types which are embodied in language [. . .] It is necessary before that he should be a person who is able to emancipate himself from the moulds which language and ordinary perception force on him and be able to see things as they really are.[118]

Hulme implies that the perception of things as they really are is not ordinary. This amounts to a dissociation between language and its objects. It idealises artistic, as opposed to, ordinary cognition, but which Hulme is at pains to compensate for in 'A Preface to Modern Art and Neo-realism':

> Two statements are confused: (1) that the source of imagination must be from nature, and (2) the consequence illegitimally drawn from this, that the resulting work must be realistic, and based on natural forms. One can give an analogy in ordinary thought. The reasoning activity is quite different in character from any succession of images drawn from the senses, but yet thought itself would be impossible without this sensual stimulus.[119]

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[116] 'Bergson's Theory of Art', *Speculations*, p. 158.

[117] 'Bergson's Theory of Art', *Speculations*, p. 164

[118] 'Bergson's Theory of Art', *Speculations*, p. 166. Alan R. Jones makes Hulme's romanticism the subject of Chapter 3 of *The Life and Opinions of T. E. Hulme*. He compares Hulme's theory of poetry to the Romantic philosophy of Coleridge and blames Bergson for it: "Through Bergson, Hulme has been led back to what amounts to a re-statement of the romantic theory of poetry and the re-affirmation of romantic Platonism", p. 46.

[119] 'A Preface to Modern Art and Neo-realism', *Further Speculations*, p. 127.

As the title of this essay indicates, Hulme is comparing his aesthetics to the philosophy of Neo-realism. It is at this point that he gets closest to the atomic idealism of Russell's materialism. He is clearly not talking about seeing objects, but seeing their atomic essence, although he admits to its mediation through perception. Hulme's explication fails to articulate this perceptual grounding of artistic cognition, it simply tell us that they do: that all perception originates in nature is offered as an unjustified explanation. This is the hollow materialism of Russell's logical atomism, which itself must resort to Platonism for referential validation. Thus Hulme develops a poetics whose logic paradoxically strays from direct empirical grounding into metaphysics, precisely because this empiricism is beyond direct perception.

Eliot's own scientific predicament can be scrutinised in the light of Hulme. In his doctoral thesis, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*, he is already making concessions to metaphysics in the absence of a definite way of resolving the cognitive problems arising out the relationship between language and its objects:

> Though we cannot say that we have either name or object . . . until we have the complete object for that name or the complete name for that object, yet the point at which this mystic marriage occurs is not exactly determinable.[120]

His commitment to science in his early literary criticism is fuelled by this unsatisfactory concession in his philosophy, yet it is more consistent than Hulme's, Eliot is ultimately pre-informed by a clearer understanding of the limits of science as he also noted in his doctoral thesis:

> There is a sense in which any science is *a priori*: in that it satisfies the needs of a particular point of view, a point of view which may be said to be more original than any of the facts that are referred to in that science.[121]

Like Hulme, his concern about seeing the object as it really is becomes a scientific imperative. But his certainty about attaining this goal is more tentative. There lies the difference. Eliot's early literary criticism exhibits a literal use of scientific language precisely to the point of rhetorical instability but compensated by Eliot's rhetorical palette: irony. As we shall see, all these recall Hulme's use of geometric analogies in his own criticism, yet Eliot, despite his own

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[120] *KE*, p.135.
[121] *KE*, p. 61.

admission, means his analogies quite literally as a way of training his eyes, and of testing scientific discourse and its usefulness as a critical tool in literature. It is this enforced literalness which characterizes the stylistic experiments Eliot initiates in *The Sacred Wood.*

Chapter 2

Ghosts and the Cognitive Problem of Impersonality

Richard Shusterman notes that:

> Eliot began his critical career in an environment of literary appreciation generally imbalanced towards the hedonistic and personal, in the wake of the anti-scientistic, anti-moralistic wave of turn-of-the-century aestheticism. Against this perceived excess of self-centred, pleasure seeking impressionistic criticism, the young Eliot vigorously and successfully rebelled; reversing the emphasis on subject pleasure for a radical privileging of objective and impersonal knowledge, 'the sense of fact' and technical analysis. Seeing a need to establish the real cognitive worth and seriousness of criticism, to transform its self-image from that of salon chatter and the adulating twaddle of the Browning Study Circle, Eliot emphasized (indeed one could say profitably overemphasised) criticism's cognitive dimension.[122]

The cognitive dimension Shusterman indicates in Eliot's criticism is thus contextualized as a reaction to the prevailing literary and philosophical climate of the early 20th-century. This climate can perhaps be more clearly understood as a battle between science and metaphysics properly fought over cognition and logic. Eliot takes part in this battle by experimenting with the logical models of F. H. Bradley and Bertrand Russell in his criticism and in doing so he rhetorically exploits their differences while developing an experimental critical style, which simultaneously feeds on the very philosophical discourses it exposes. The differences between realism and idealism in the first two decades of the twentieth-century are not absolute, and Eliot is particularly aware of this fine line.[123] Yet it is still significant to note the facility with which Eliot seems to reconcile their philosophical styles.[124] This is, as we have seen, the strategy at work in 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' (1917), which Eliot develops further throughout the later essays and reviews collected in *The Sacred Wood* and particularly in 'Hamlet and His Problems' (1919).

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[122] Richard Shusterman, *T.S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism* (London: Duckworth, 1988), p. 204.

[123] In 'The Relation between Politics and Metaphysics' (1913) (MS), Eliot makes clear that, for him, there is an overlap between all apparently opposing philosophical doctrines. After reviewing the main philosophical currents, he concludes: "all anti-thetical philosophies tend to meet", p. 21.

[124] It is worth mentioning that it is figures such as Josiah Royce and his graduate seminars which, between 1913-14, encouraged Eliot towards a practical interdisciplinary reading of philosophy: "His [Royce's] most notable contribution to the teaching of the university was made through his seminar in logic, which became a veritable clearing house of science. Men of widely different training and technique – chemists, physiologists, statisticians, pathologists, mathematicians –, who could not understand one another, were here interpreted to one another by Royce, who understood them all" ('Josiah Royce', *Science*, N.S. 44 (Dec. 1, 1916), p. 773), quoted in *Josiah Royce's Seminar, 1913-1914: as recorded in the books of Harry T. Costello*, Grover Smith ed. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p xi. Royce himself was a curious hybrid of idealism and pragmatism with analytical inclinations.

The main difference between 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' and 'Hamlet and His Problems' is that in the earlier essay Eliot does not address the problem of cognition directly. The advantage of this limitation is that it avoids a premature complication of the logical models Eliot is utilizing in his critical discourse. 'Hamlet and his Problems' is a more revealing piece because the cognitive legitimization it seeks for its logic reveals more explicit faults in the method; Eliot's rhetorical compensations become more evident in the very enactment of logic. The logical inconsistencies exposed by Eliot's critical formulation of the *objective correlative* in 'Hamlet and His Problems' expose the difficulties of applying scientific methods to literary criticism. Even if literature can claim the scientific absoluteness preached by logic, the correlation is undercut by the impossibility of Eliot's critical discourse to achieve this exactitude in the first place. It simply will not fit. At worst, it renders the very role of criticism pointless because it suggests that art can best speak for itself, or that, at best, criticism becomes a parody of scientific discourse.

Description and Interpretation

The increasing importance of cognition in Eliot's criticism is evident in 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama' in *The Sacred Wood*, where he announces that:

> Permanent literature is always a presentation: either a presentation of thought, or a presentation of feeling by a statement of events in human action or objects in the external world.[125]

It is not clear what sort of *presentation* is Eliot referring to. Philosophically one can either refer to a number of possibilities, of which Russell's knowledge by description in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) or Bradley's theory of immediate experience are the most likely. Perhaps the answer can be found in a set of notes entitled 'Description and Interpretation'[126] written in 1913-14, in which Eliot states that:

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125 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', *SW*, pp. 64-65.

126 *T.S. Eliot's Philosophical Essays and Notes (1913-4)* are part of T. S Eliot Collection Bequeathed to King's College Cambridge by John Davy Hayward in 1965. They pre-empt most of the central philosophical themes Eliot was to explore in his thesis and his major philosophical articles: 'The Development of Leibniz's Monadism' and 'Leibniz's Monadism and Bradley's Finite Centres'.

> Take any simple object you will, give an account of it, and you will find that you have given an evaluation and an interpretation. If you really describe the thing as it really is, the whole truth about it, you would not be describing, you would be presenting; described and description would be identical.[127]

Eliot's *presentation*, therefore, offers a middle way in the description and interpretation dialectic. It is in the synthesis of these two poles of cognitive expression where Eliot finds *permanent literature* exists. Even as Eliot appears to be seduced by the idea of literature resolving a problem of philosophical expression, one must note that in 'Description and Interpretation' *presentation* appears only as a theoretical hypothesis not fulfilled in practice. Eliot's point is that, in the act of explanation every state of a particular case subsumes a universal law. It is impossible to hold on to a single point of view in the interpretation of a particular case without implying its transcendental reduction; hence, all explanations are inherently metaphysical in their disposition to self-transcendence. For instance, statements like

> "the walls collapsed because of the weight of the roof, I took a cold because I sat in a draft", state not only a sequence but a general principle.[128]

Description, on the other hand, presents a development of the problem of explanation; it is the point when the case explained amounts to the law it subsumes. So,

> if the particular can be felt to have no other aspect than what the law covers, we have simply described it, for in stating the particular we have already stated the universal, and the independent statement of the universal does not give [way to] that transition to a higher degree of reality which is explanation.[129]

Description, unlike explanation - or interpretation -, apparently involves no metaphysical transition to a "higher degree of reality", because in a way it is already there or here. But

> the hypothetical limiting case of description would be pure contemplation which does not alter its object, and that for a finite consciousness is out of the question .[130]

The first thing this does is blur the distinction between explanation and description. But it is the hue of the blur which is interesting. First, 'description' as pure contemplation of an object for finite consciousness is rendered impossible, then Eliot proposes that description always falls short of being identical with its object, that is, all descriptions are really explanations. In turn:

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[127] 'Description and Interpretation', *T.S. Eliot's Philosophical Essays and Notes (1913-4)*, Hayward Bequest (1965), King's College Library, Cambridge, pp 5-6.

[128] 'Description and Interpretation', p. 3.

[129] 'Description and Interpretation', p. 4.

[130] 'Description and Interpretation', pp. 4-5.

"Explanation through reference to a general principle must pass onto description"[131]. That is, explanation is the failure of description, and description is the secret metaphysical drive that brings explanation into being. In a way they are the same thing, only separated by their own hermeneutic expectations.

One may argue that Eliot remains ambiguous about his position with respect to description and explanation. And given that he equates description with science and explanation with metaphysics, one may add that Eliot is already in the period 1913-14 struggling to develop a middle way between Bradley and Russell. Given Russell's visit to Harvard at the time and the attention Josiah Royce's seminars – attended by Eliot – were paying to it, one can perhaps only deduce that these notes are more likely a reaction to Russell that to Bradley. Transcripts of the Seminar show the issue of description frequently being discussed[132], and Eliot's paper of the 24th of February 1914 claims that "description is just as bad as explanation"[133], and the summary of the session notes that:

> The second paper, by Mr Eliot, said the difference between description and explanation was in the act rather than in the content. Explanation is more primitive, description more sophisticated [. . .] To sum up, explanation is an act which tries with indifferent success to bring the particular under the universal; description tries to stay in the particular as given, but in spite of itself transforms the given by the interpretation it gives to it.[134]

Eliot's evaluation of description parallels Bradley's dissatisfaction with Russell's analytical pretensions in the latter's account of knowledge by description[135]; that is, the problematisation of Russell's easy passage from knowledge by acquaintance to knowledge by description, and his inability to give a full account of universals by means of this analysis. These assumptions are at the heart of the cognitive premises of Russell's logical materialism,

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131 'Description and Interpretation', p. 3.

132 What is clear is that Eliot does not take definite sides within the philosophical debate itself, which refutes the argument by Jeffrey Perl and Andrew Tuck that Eliot preferred description to explanation. See Jeffrey Perl and Andrew Tuck's 'The Significance of T. S. Eliot's Philosophical Notebooks' in *T.S. Eliot: Essays from the Southern Review*, James Olney ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 157-178, (p. 168).

133 Grover Smith ed., *Josiah Royce's Seminar, 1913-1914 : As Recorded in the Books of Harry T. Costello* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. 119.

134 Smith, *Josiah Royce's Seminar*, p. 120-121.

135 For a sense of the general polemic between Russell and Bradley see: B. Russell, 'Some Explanations in Reply to Mr Bradley', *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 19, Issue 75 (July 1910), 373-378 and F. H. Bradley, 'Reply to Mr Russell's Explanations', *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 20, Issue 77 (January 1911), 74-76.

which encourage a radical referentialism. Eliot's philosophical notes seem to imply a rejection of this philosophical position, yet in his emphasis on presentation in 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama' he appears to be changing his mind for the sake of rescuing discourse from the subjectivity of interpretation, at least with reference to literature. Yet there is an important difference with Russell. Eliot's presentation in 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama' does not refer to the world by description, but to thoughts and feelings through the medium of human action and external objects. In other words, Eliot has in mind a world with all its metaphysical consequences when he is thinking about the kinds of objects that should be *presented* to cognition. Eliot adopts a scientific discourse but simultaneously defies its empirical paradigms.

Eliot's negotiations between description and interpretation parallel his meanderings between science and metaphysics. Eliot's 'middle way' is not in these early days a philosophical position; the originality of his move is that he envisions the reconciliation between metaphysics and science as a problem of style. Jeffrey Perl is sensitive to Eliot's approach when he says that:

> Human language is a poor medium in which to work the precisions of philosophy. The theorist's project is "largely one of oversimplification and it entails a reduction of the knots, echoes and vagaries that constitute a language" [. . .] Ideas are comprised by sentences, and so Eliot regarded philosophy as properly a genre of prose composition.[136]

Eliot imports this approach from the current philosophical inclination to resolve epistemological and cognitive problems through logic and the analysis of language, while he gradually stamps it with his own personal contribution. The exploitation of logic, in turn, enacts the application of his philosophical knowledge to his literary interests, so that he can develop – or simply take advantage of – some of the problems he encounters in his philosophical studies through his literary criticism. Thus *The Sacred Wood* does not amount to a definite backing of science despite its apparent call to do so but the recycling of his philosophy studies.

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136 Jeffrey Perl, 'The Language of Theory and the Language of Poetry: The Significance of T.S. Eliot's Philosophical Notebooks, Part Two', *Southern Review*, 21 (Winter 1985), 1012-1023 (p. 1017).

The 'Presentation' of Metaphysics

In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' we are warned that: "This essay proposes to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism"[137]. This statement is clear enough and appears to speak for the collection of essays as a whole.[138] Eliot seems determined to follow the scientific way, or at least avoid metaphysics, thus, one assumes, privileging description over explanation. Yet Eliot's warning is in a sense inappropriate because over-cautious. It reveals a degree of self-consciousness about the metaphysical pitfalls he is implicitly trying to avoid by adopting science as a critical model. The statement assumes the reader's predisposition to over-step this frontier and fall into metaphysical considerations. A warning to the blind that there *might be* a hole in the pavement and that *if* there is one they will fall in it. Yet, this sentence tells us more. It tells us, not so much to leave metaphysics alone but encourages us to peer across just as we are to halt at the frontier and, in so doing, it controls our metaphysical deductions; that is, about the type of metaphysics which may share a sentence with mysticism. It is a wonderful, if muted, control of language. An unexpected dimension of the essay is revealed by precisely this gesture of closing that semantic avenue, which, in turn, results in the invitation to contemplate the terms which, having been taken for granted, are discarded. This interpretation owes something to A. D. Nuttall, who argues that:

> A phrase in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' strongly suggests that Eliot was aware of a continuum between the problem of literature and those of metaphysics, and stooped himself from passing from one to the other only by calling an abrupt halt [. . .] But already in the essay he has more than once trembled on the edge.[139]

For Nuttall, Eliot's halting at the frontier of metaphysics perhaps reflects his own difficulty in keeping philosophical and literary questions separate. Consequently, I think his account misses

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137 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 59

138 Having said this, the reader must be aware that the items collected in *The Sacred Wood* cover a period of review and essay writing, mainly between 1919 to 1920. The first 'An American Critic' is published in *New Statesman*, VII. 168 (June 24, 1916) but most of them are written in 1919 and 1920, the year *The Sacred Wood* is published. His reviews in particular were not always signed. Thus it is not clear whether we can speak of an explicit agenda in *The Sacred Wood*, not only because they were written separately and not necessarily thinking of each other, but because review writing is a contextual exercise. Thus it is perhaps better to keep in mind Eliot's agenda in the critical writing of this period as expressed implicitly in his critical style, which may be seen as a kind of signature writing. This itself fits with his reluctance to abide by particular points of views and take refuge in the form, rather than the content, as expression of opinion and personality.

139 A. D. Nuttall, *A Common Sky: Philosophy and the Literary Imagination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), p. 213.

the potential rhetorical control at work in Eliot's warning. The result is Eliot's presentation of metaphysics in the text as an object of contemplation; to make it self-evident in a way that it makes its explanation superfluous. Conversely, the explanation of a general concept, such as 'metaphysics', would certainly not reach description. This perverse logic is present in Bradley's *Principles of Logic*, because it implies that whether we affirm or deny judgement we always assume the existence of the idea it contains. As Bradley puts it:

> In all negative judgement, the ultimate subject is the reality that comes to us in presentation. We affirm in all alike that the quality of the real excludes an ideal content which is offered. And so every judgement, positive or negative, is in the end existential.[140]

This logic demands that the unknowability of the ideal must always determine the particularity of the real; just as description must always refer to a general law through explanation. This is precisely the scientific objection and the problem Russell encounters in general words - that is, words whose referent is not available to our knowledge through acquaintance - but which he has to concede must be universals as he admits in *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (1914).[141] Eliot is engaging with the same problem; while committing himself to scientific method, Eliot is actively incorporating metaphysics into his discourse as an unknowable implied; even if to do so involves reducing metaphysics to a term without a referent. This incorporation involves the gradual incarnation of the unknowability of universals into objects presentable to consciousness, which begins with the indirect attempt to determine the reality of metaphysics as a term. Eliot begins to describe metaphysics precisely at the point he refuses to describe it. The result is a kind of 'presentation' never totally complete.

In 'Description and Interpretation' Eliot distinguishes between the use of language particular to science and that of metaphysics :

> In general one may say that description is the function of science, explanation (or interpretation) of metaphysics.[142]

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140 Bradley, Chapter III: 'The Negative Judgement', *Principles*, I, p. 120.

141 "I conclude, therefore, though with hesitation, that there are universals and not merely general words", Russell, 'An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth' (1914) in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell (1903-1959)*, Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn eds. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), p. 250.

142 'Description and Interpretation', p. 6.

If Eliot sees explanation as a metaphysical enterprise, the best way to halt at its frontier is not to explain. To reduce 'metaphysics' to a mere term and discredit it by forcing it to share its space with 'mysticism' is, surely, the best exorcism of them all. It equates the universal status of metaphysics with esoteric unknowability. Yet, in the very process of doing this, Eliot is validating the term by determining its degree of reality even within the scientific discourse his criticism is adopting. In effect, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' explicitly encourages a scientific approach: the importance of description in criticism, and the impersonal approach that description entails. Take the following passage:

> It is in this depersonalisation that art may be said to approach the condition of science. I shall, therefore, invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide.[143]

This is the well-known analogy with which Eliot attempts to describe the impersonal role of the artist in the creative process. Yet it seems that Eliot is describing when he means to explain and explain when he means to describe. There is, however, a latent desire that the analogy may work literally, for it is not coincidence that the analogy is scientific, though we are forced to take his word for it. It is but an analogy which gives a philosophical argument when a scientific description is what is intended; science is misappropriated as an analogy and not as a correspondence. At a literal level, then, Eliot is clear: scientific method is his choice, and, accordingly, sets the boundaries of his essay at the frontier of metaphysics because, among other things, Eliot had stated in 'Description and Interpretation' :

> Metaphysics involves personality more than does science, and explanation is explanation comprehended by a point of view.[144]

Metaphysics becomes subjective because its judgement is not governed by an empirically determinable point of view; it is ineffable and the point of view it adopts inevitably involves a personal interpretation. Personal interpretation is for Eliot always pejoratively *emotional*. Yet, in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', he undermines the absolute distinction between interpretation and description by adding: "But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions knows what it means to want to escape from those things."[145] Similarly, only those

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[143] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 53.

[144] 'Description and Interpretation', p. 6.

[145] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 58.

that explain can possibly know what it is to want to describe. Eliot's choice between science and metaphysics is after all not any clearer in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' than in 'Description and Interpretation'. Though Eliot appears to make a choice to escape emotion, personality and metaphysics, he seems to settle for less, or for what is possible; that is, if only "to know what it means to escape from these things". Reality is not ultimately presentable in its completeness.

'Presentation' and 'object of contemplation' are precisely the terms Eliot uses to refer to the impossibility of the scientific project in 'Description and Interpretation'. If my explanation of Eliot's statement is descriptive, I must conclude that Eliot is in fact describing explanation; to do so is the closest one can get to presenting an object to pure contemplation as absolute description. Thus explanation becomes an object of description, metaphysics the object of science. Yet, Eliot does not, cannot, expel metaphysics from 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. Eliot's mistake, if it is a mistake, is to identify 'metaphysics' in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', which, in a sense, takes him over its frontier. My concern is to note the extent to which Eliot is compelled to make this mistake – whether the metaphysical implications of science would inevitably become apparent in any case (hence the warning to halt at its frontier) so that naming metaphysics is not a fault but an strategy to control its inevitability; a conscious stylistic project, in other words, an experiment with the medium of literary criticism.

John Paul Riquelme notes that:

> Eliot's claim that the essay 'proposes to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism', and confine itself to practical conclusions. But it does not halt at the frontier of what might be expected in the style and structure of a literary essay in the Arnoldean tradition.[146]

My approach to 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is not dissimilar from Riquelme's. He, too, stresses the importance of the stylistic strategies of the essay, yet he is more concerned to place it against the 19th-century essay tradition. Though Riquelme does not provide any

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[146] John Paul Riquelme's 'The Modernist Essay: The Case of T. S. Eliot – Poet as Critic' in *Southern Review*, 21, no 4 (October 1985), p. 1027. For an alternative view of the relation of Eliot's critical writing and Arnold see Edward Lobb, *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). Lobb argues that Eliot owes his critical style to the Romantic tradition of essay writing and specially to Arnold.

information as to Eliot's philosophical position within the debate between Russell and Bradley, he offers a glimpse of Eliot's *stylistic* alternative to this philosophical debate through his participation in the literary tradition of essay writing. This alternative context may prove essential if Eliot's criticism is not to be reduced to a simple re-writing of the philosophy problems he was trying to transcend. This is a problem Eliot is consciously fighting as he points out in 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', that literary practices should not embody a philosophy but they should replace it.[147] It is however difficult to determine the extent to which Eliot means this replacement to be understood simply in literary terms. This assumption can also be conceived as the typical romantic mistake of idealizing poetics to resolve what ordinary discourse may not attain. The understanding of Eliot's critical style as a poetics of essay writing, however, is reductive; it ignores the strength of his participation in the alternative discourses of philosophy: metaphysical and scientific. Participation is, after all, the only possible route to influence what is external to the individual. The apparent content of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' – the scientific and impersonal approach of description – may be Russell's, but the rhetorical strategy – its use of *metaphysics* – is Bradley's. The result is not a literary embodiment, but a replacement through the rhetorical expansion of the philosophical discourse as a critical practice.

Contradictions and Unreal Objects

If we are to avoid concluding that Eliot's critical position is clearly pro-scientific and anti-metaphysical, the essays and reviews included in *The Sacred Wood* must be read in the context of the Bradley-Russell debate. In other words, the philosophical context not only gives us information about what Eliot is ultimately concerned with, but gives clear clues about the stylistic strategies he uses to overcome the philosophical problems he had encountered as a student of philosophy. This style is itself a philosophical borrowing in the form of logic; that Eliot denies 'metaphysics' – as explanation – does not necessarily imply its rejection but, rather, reveals itself as the affirmation of a double negation. Hence, if Eliot "raises the expectation of definition", he does so "only in order to defeat it", as Jeffrey Perl comments in

147 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', *SW*, p. 66.

'The Significance of T. S. Eliot's Philosophical Notebooks'[148]. Yet, this defeat is in itself a form of definition; it is, for Bradley, the inevitable defeat of every scientific project which pretends to describe.

For Bradley, all description fails because firstly it alters the object it analyses, and secondly, because there is no such thing as a conscious acquaintance with sense data which, in turn, cannot avoid being affected by the descriptive process of logical reconstruction after its analysis is complete. This attack on Bertrand Russell is confirmed by the latter's inability to provide an empirical account of general words – which he has to concede must be in line with universals -, that is, the nature of their encounter with our senses. The direct acquaintance of general words goes unaccounted for by Russell – unless, of course, one resorts to a theory of pre-cognition as in the Platonic forms. Bradley may agree with Russell that universals are not readily available, but in 'Some Problems in Connection with Mr Russell's Doctrine' he dismisses this necessity: "There is no such thing as a bare universal, nor for my consciousness of universality is such a thing wanted, nor could it serve."[149] Unlike Russell[150], Bradley argues that universals come to us already available in our encounter with particulars. The relation of particulars to universals is accounted for through Bradley's own brand of idealist logic. For him the universal ground, always contaminated by the particular, subsists in the mixture as a negation:

> It is in a word *negation* which is implied in our awareness of universals and which makes that awareness possible [. . .] The universal idea cannot come before us as bare, but this universal on the other hand is used as the positive ground of a negation, and, as that, it can on reflection be affirmed.[151]

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148 *T.S. Eliot: Essays from the Southern Review*, James Olney ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 172. Furthermore, it is this feature which is behind the general impression that Eliot's critical essays never seem to be quite about what their titles lead one to expect.

149 F. H. Bradley, 'Some Problems in Connection with Mr Russell's Doctrine', *Essays on Truth and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), p. 296.

150 Russell relies on formal logic to account for those general propositions beyond empirical verification, thus attempting to separate the universal from the particular. This distinction is one Russell forces upon himself as a means of criticising both Hegelian idealism and old empiricism, but which is only able to sustain with difficulty in the face of the non-empirical nature of universals, general words and propositions. Pure logic is the closest Russell, inadvertently, gets to Idealist logic; this is an idealism he compensates for by encouraging a more radical separation of the empirical world from idealist predicative logic. See Bertrand Russell, 'Logic as the essence of philosophy' in *Our Knowledge of the External World* (London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1914).

151 Bradley, 'Some Problems in Connection with Mr Russell's Doctrine', *Essays on Truth and Reality*, pp. 296 & 298.

Is this the *negation* inherent in the mystical metaphysics Russell is so suspicious of, where "logic is practically identical with metaphysics"[152]? Bradley's *negation* is of the universal, not of the world; it is a denial which, instead, affirms, or *presents* the world. But, Bradley asks, "how can negation help me arrive at that from which it proceeds, and which presupposes as already there?"[153] Eliot cannot answer this question either, but what he does do, by halting at the frontier of metaphysics and mysticism, is engage with the sort of stylistic negativity which Bradley suggests. This is a stylistic negativity that affirms as a way of determining the extent to which something is true; to determine – in Bradley's terms – the *degree* of its reality. If Russell complains that the logic of mysticism and idealism indulges in the negative way of attaining truth by denying the world of facts[154], then Eliot, like Bradley, is not of that particular brand of metaphysicians – or mystics. They attempt, instead, to determine what exactly, if negatively, is true in the world without, like Russell, being forced to accept it all as empirically real or, else, illusory. In other words, to accept that the world is made of appearances is not to say that there is nothing real about it. In 'The Validity of Artificial Distinctions', one of Eliot's graduate essays, he sums up this point as follows: "The world is not [. . .] there, for metaphysics to play upon it; it is itself metaphysical."[155] Thus, the admission of the metaphysicality of the world does not overrule a scientific approach. That the world is metaphysical is also to say that there is something about it that must be treated as real, and it is with this kind of world that science should concern itself.

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[152] Russell, 'Logic as the Essence of Philosophy', *Our Knowledge of the External World*, p. 38. Also see Russell's 'Mysticism and Logic', *The Hibbert Journal* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914)) where Russell struggles as he attempts to untangle the mystical from the logic. It mainly amounts to an attack on Bergsonian Intuitionism and Idealism and a defence of the scientific method. Yet, it is an ambiguous attack because it involves not so much a disproof of metaphysics as its scientific appropriation: "But direct acquaintance of this kind is given fully in sensation, and does not require, so far as I can see, any special faculty of intuition for its apprehension [. . .] Scientific philosophy thus represents, though as yet only in a nascent condition, a higher form of thought than any pre-scientific belief or imagination, and, like every approach to self-transcendence it brings with it a rich reward in increase of scope and breath and comprehension", pp. 791 & 803.

[153] Bradley, 'Some Problems in Connection with Mr Russell's Doctrine', *Essays on Truth and Reality*, p. 297.

[154] "This is the negative side of the mystic's initiation: the doubt concerning common knowledge, preparing the way for the reception of what it seems a higher wisdom. Many men to whom this negative experience is familiar do not pass beyond it, but for the mystic it is merely the gateway to an ampler world", Russell, 'Mysticism and Logic', *The Hibbert Journal*, p. 784.

[155] Jeffrey Perl, *Skepticism and Modern Enmity: Before and After Eliot* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 71.

The negative method of Bradley's logic has strong stylistic implications for Eliot, but also important philosophical consequences, particularly in the realm of cognition and the classification of objects, just as Russell's own logic implies an empirical conception of reality. On the 5th of May 1914, Eliot delivered a paper at Royce's seminars on the classification of different types of objects (*Gegenstnde hoherer Ordnung*) in the philosophies of Alexus Meinong, Bradley and Russell. In Costello's notes of the seminar, Eliot argues against Russell's conception of objects as complexes of sense-data directly present to our acquaintance:

> An analysis of objects into complexes of sense-data does not give anything necessarily more real. Things – real things, including unreal (*useless*) – are normal objects. Do not begin with sense-data. Atoms the ultimate, perhaps. Bundle of sense data will be only sense-data; a thing is made of other things.[156]

This parallels Bradley's criticism in 'Some Problems in Connection with Mr Russell's Doctrine' which we have considered above. Yet despite the apparent Bradleyanism Eliot's conclusion seems dissatisfied:

> Any philosophy which tries to interpret one type of object in terms of others is metaphysics and not description. In description one type of object is just as real and self-dependent as another.[157]

The point is that if the perception of objects cannot be reducible to its component sense-data, then what is it reducible to? Other objects? The temptation is idealistic. To reduce the real object to its ideal counterpart appears as the only alternative, but that is an unhappy conclusion for Eliot. What Eliot does find useful is the linguistic debate encouraged by this problem: that is, the relation of signs to their referents as a parallel problem to that of the relation of the ideal to the real. As Costello notes in his summary of the discussion: "Much of the discussion turned on the distinction between ideas and things. A sign is a thing plus a meaning; an idea is only a meaning."[158]

Russell himself had strong views on the subject. These views revolve around the relation of denoting phrases to their objects, and the importance of description in determining the truth or error of the object-in-the-world they are referring to. In 'On Denoting' Russell again insists on the referential relation between denotation and object.[159] Here Russell seeks to

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[156] Smith, *Josiah Royce's Seminars*, p. 173.
[157] Smith, *Josiah Royce's Seminars*, p. 175.
[158] Smith, *Josiah Royce's Seminars*, p. 177.
[159] Russell, 'On Denoting', *Mind*, 14 (1905), pp. 479-493.

justify his assumption of direct acquaintance as the foundation of all our object cognition in the face of objects not directly before us – general words and universals; logically to explain how a denoting phrase may determine truth or error when its referent is not immediately available. In doing so he is trying to avoid Meinong's admission that denoting phrases may denote unreal objects. For Meinong any grammatically correct denoting phrase stands for an object even if *that* object does not exist. Against this Russell insists that: "denoting phrases never have any meaning in themselves, but that every proposition in whose verbal expression they occur has a meaning."[160] By 'meaning' Russell is referring to the 'real object referent' for each individual proposition. Russell asks: "But how can a non-identity be the subject of a proposition?"[161] Against this radical referentiality, Eliot – along with Meinong and Bradley – encourages what could be identified, at this stage, as linguistic arbitrariness; where idea and thing, signifier and signified, hold a degree of autonomy from each other. Thus Eliot's rejection of linguistic referentiality is embedded in a theory of cognition which makes no absolute distinction between real and unreal objects as linguistic referents. This conclusion comes from the assumption that ideas do not exist as empirically verifiable objects to which denoting phrases may be said to refer absolutely. Equally, all objects partake of a certain degree of unreality imbedded in both the intentionally of the object and the meaning of its properties – or propositions of the denoting phrase to use Russell's language. This is a subject which Eliot considered in more detail in his doctoral thesis.

Chapter V of Eliot's thesis; 'The Epistemologist's Theory of Knowledge (continued)'; deals with the problem of the classification of objects other than ordinary objects. This classification includes hallucinations, imaginary and unreal objects. Eliot's point of departure, like his seminar paper and notes on the subject, are the respective theories on the logical status of unreal objects in Meinong and Russell, only Eliot offers the hallucination as his own way to approach the same subject:

> I wish to touch on the facts of visual hallucination first, because, while the problem is essentially the same as that dealt with by Russell and Meinong, it appears in a more readily apprehensible form, and because it has

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[160] Russell, 'On Denoting', p. 480.

[161] Russell, 'On Denoting', p. 485.

> by some been reduced to a different explanation from that of unreal objects in judgement, whereas I believe the hallucination to be in virtually the same position as the round-square; both are non-existent and both are intended objects[162].

This treatment of hallucinations becomes a debate on language as Eliot confirms the link between his interest in cognition and logical problems.

The problem with unreal objects, as dealt with by Russell in 'On denoting', is that by virtue of the possibility of their denotation – for example, 'square circle', 'the present King of France' – one may erroneously give them ontological status. The danger Russell is highlighting is that of falling into subjective idealism where the subject's intention virtually *creates* the world without the possibility of telling error from truth. Despite Eliot's criticism of Russell, he is happy to identify this problem:

> The so-called hallucination is real and true when properly understood; when stating an error we really meant a truth [. . .] The world as we are acquainted from this point of view is an artificial construction, and, our point of view not being large enough to grasp the whole, we consider the rest as simply the debris of our own slight structure. This is perhaps a doctrine of a certain idealism.[163]

Yet, error is the meaningful denotation of that which we cannot incorporate into our cognitive horizon at any one time, which is not to say that what is erroneous does not exists. Error is the reminder that perception is not merely immediate. This is too ambiguous for the philosophically rigorous Russell who insists that the laws of logic may be applied to create absolute distinctions between truth and error, reality and illusion, along the lines of his law of contradiction. This theory determines that no denoting phrase may both affirm and deny its meaning at the same time. Essentially Russell's concern is the logical absurdity implied by the denotation of unreal objects. He notes in 'On Denoting':

> Mr MacColl (*Mind*, N.S., No 54, and again No 55, p. 401) regards individuals as of two sorts, real and unreal; hence he defines the null-class as the class consisting of all unreal individuals. This assumes that such phrases as "the present King of France", which do not denote a real individual, do, nevertheless, denote an individual, but an unreal one. This is essentially Meinong's theory, which we have seen reason to reject because it conflicts with the law of contradiction. With our theory of denoting, we are able to hold that there are no unreal individuals; so that the null-class is the class containing no members, not the class containing as members all unreal individuals.[164]

For Russell there is no such thing as an unreal object, such a term being in itself meaningless. In turn, for Eliot, Russell's position holds a further absurdity: "In logic, perhaps, but not in

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[162] *KE*, p. 113.

[163] *KE*, p. 118.

[164] Russell, 'On Denoting', p. 491.

metaphysics, a denoting phrase may denote nothing"[165]. Thus Russell's logical account of cognition is, for Eliot, incomplete.

Eliot argues that one can only hallucinate when one believes it possible[166], that is, when one accepts that cognitive errors are possible and that it is this possibility that is behind the very possibility of recognising ourselves as sane. Hallucinations are real. This is because in his doctoral thesis Eliot sees no grounds to sustain that the real world is ultimately independent from our cognition:

> So far as [a hallucination] exists it has all the features of the real world, and it exists so far as it is believed [. . .] The apprehension of an object known to be imaginary does not differ essentially from the apprehension of any other object, unless we have hocus-pocussed an external reality to which ideas are to 'conform'.[167]

Eliot reverses the existential status of an autonomous external world, to reveal that this assumption is ultimately more mystical than the idea of the world's dependence on cognitive intentionality. A hallucination is not an unreal object, in the sense that Russell understands unreal objects to be. For Eliot "an object is an object so far as it is believed to be so."[168] An object, to be so must be intended, which is not to say that intentionality creates the world of objects. This is perhaps the main difficulty behind cognitive intentionality. What it comes down to for Eliot is that a denoting phrase – in so far as it intends an object, be it unreal, imaginary or ordinary object – already denotes *something*. This implies a reality which is not completely external, to which our ideas do not have to conform, it merely points out the limits of our perception and of what is possible. This is, in effect, the ultimate ontological affirmation of the world, not its subjective disintegration:

> The real world is not outside or inside; it is not present in our consciousness or to consciousness as a particular group of entities, for as presented it is not in or to consciousness at all: it simply is.[169]

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[165] *KE*, p. 128.

[166] Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924), H. T. Lowe-Porter trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1969) contains a short address about the misconception of the experience of hallucination which parallels Eliot's own. In 'Operationes Spirituales' Herr Settembrini notes the horror of *sane* people towards hallucinations: "If it did happen to any of them it would be a sure sign that they were *not* sound . . . and they would react to the appearance with emotions of horror ..., but treat it as it were entirely in order, and begin a conversation with it – this being, in fact, the reaction of a person suffering from a hallucination" (p. 452).

[167] *KE*, pp. 115, p. 123.

[168] *KE*, p. 119.

[169] *KE*, p. 139.

The existential status of objects is not dependent on its sensual particularity but on its being, which is already acknowledged through its very denotation which tells us at the very least that there is something *there.* This leads Eliot to make an important distinction between *thatness* and *whatness* of objects

> We do not denote any qualities of the object, as such; we do not, that is, denote any definition which could be given of the object; we denote not its *whatness* but its *thatness.*[170]

However, this conclusion does not completely resolve the latent subjectivism of this theory of language; the implication that language creates the world. This problem is attenuated by substituting for the idea that some denoting phrases denote nothing, with the possibility of determining the degree of reality a denoting phrase achieves; the *thatness* implied in denotation:

> Somehow, obscurely, the object denoted is acknowledged existence. It is non-existent according to the practical standards which recognize no degrees between existence and non-existence; but for metaphysics, it cannot be denied practical reality without being admitted to some attenuated but (if you like) equally real reality.[171]

This allows a two-tier level of cognition in which the object is half-created half-perceived, and whose reality is not ultimately real or unreal. Eliot is here conditioning idealist accounts of reality, but conditioning it, if only to avoid the conclusion that it is cognitive intentionality alone which ultimately creates the world through language.[172]

The relation between an object and its denotation is not one of description as such, not a *whatness* but a *thatness.* If anything, this view encourages the autonomy of the object from its denotation and vice versa. Yet it stresses the level of reality already achieved in the denotation alone; that

> It is a mistake, I think, to treat the word as something which barely points to the object, a sign-post which you leave behind on the road. The word 'chimera' or the idea 'chimera' is the beginning of the reality chimera and is absolutely continuous with it, and the 'present king of France' is already partially real.[173]

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170 *KE,* p. 134.

171 *KE,* p. 128.

172 "I am very far from meaning that it is the act of naming which makes the object, for the activity does not proceed from one side more than from another", *KE,* p. 133.

173 *KE,* p. 29.

But what exactly links an object to its denotation? On this matter Eliot struggles. On the one hand we have the world of objects simply being *there*, and on the other, we have denoting phrases which denote objects which may not be practically there at all:

> If we cannot say that we have that object until we have that name, since each name is a different way of organizing a set of experiences, so on the other hand we have not really got that name until we have the right object [. . .] As we may fancy, if we like, objects wandering waiting to be met with and be named (like the animals in the Garden of Eden), so we may fancy names wandering about in our heads waiting for objects.[174]

Eliot may not be able to solve the nature of this, as he puts it, *mystic marriage*, but what he insists upon is that the problem may never be solved if we continue to insist "that there is one consistent world of the real and that the rest is illusory"[175]; that there is either an empirically consistent world of sense-data or an ideal dimension which the world only reflects through a glass darkly. We must think, Eliot argues, of the real and the unreal developing side by side. If we assume that the ordinary object is more real, it is simply due to the habit in common usage of taking the names of ordinary objects as referential:

> But we are accustomed to handle and use [ordinary objects] by symbols which merely denote them; we forget that their reality is as much in their meaning as in their denotation, and we take it for granted that they simply are. Nor is this belief an error - the matter is much more complicated than that! [176]

No object, however ordinary, is just that. But equally Eliot is not rejecting this necessary referential practice, but presents it as only one side of the semiotic mirror. Ordinary and unreal objects are each aspects of the relation between signifier and signified. The former indicates the direction of continuity between the object and its denotation, the latter between the denotation and the object. This continuity is one of degrees, and their distinction not absolute. One must note, however, that Eliot is inconclusive and there is an underlying dissatisfaction in his argument. Part of this dissatisfaction is in Eliot's inability to make metaphysics validate his expansion of logical reality to include unreal objects.

The heart of the problem lies in the denotation of 'metaphysics' in the first place. Metaphysics is after all an unreal object, which itself cannot be expected to resolve the problem

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[174] *KE*, p. 135.
[175] *KE*, p. 135,
[176] *KE*, p. 131.

of degrees of reality on whose existence the very theory depends. It is in his literary criticism that Eliot commits himself to this project; a project which involves the development of a stylistic experimentation which may enable him to encompass the problem of the metaphysical grounding of reality, and which he does by stretching the frontiers of science.

Imaginary Objects, Immediate Experience and the 'Correlative'

As Eliot moves from philosophy to literary criticism he is keen to apply his findings to poetics. In fact, Eliot's concern with poetics is already pre-empted in his consideration of the status of imaginary objects in 'The Epistemologist's Theory of Knowledge (continued)' of his doctoral thesis:

> If the character in fiction is an imaginary object, it must be by virtue of something more than its being imaginary, i.e. merely intending a reality which is not [. . .] The fiction is thus more that a fiction: it is a *real* fiction.[177]

The inclusion of poetics in Eliot's general theory of objects and language has familiar consequences in the realm of authorial intentionality and interpretation. Eliot continues:

> We thus analyse the intended object of fiction into its reference and its reality. The reality in its turn is not a simple object but an intended object, for it includes everything from the antecedents of the character in the author's mind, to the symbols which express the character on paper. We mean the characters as a presentation in the author's mind; but a figure in fiction may and often does have an existence for us distinct from what is merely our interpretation of what the author 'had in mind'.[178]

So that as objects go, the object of authorial intention is not purely intentional from the point of view of the author, in so far as intentionality – however important – is only partly responsible for the existential status of the work. Thus,

> frequently we feel more confidence in our own interpretation of the character than in any account of the genesis and meaning which the author may give himself. This is not always mere accident; no really vital character in fiction is altogether a conscious construction of the author . . . So that we come to feel that the point of view from which the author criticises is not wholly internal to the point of view from which he created the character.[179]

The implication is that artistic creativity is not wholly different to the creative element in common perception, and like the latter, artistic creativity cannot be wholly conscious of the reasons for seeing what it sees precisely because intentionality is not complete as such. For this reason, the author may not necessarily give a better account of its vision than an outsider. These

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177 *KE*, pp. 123-4.
178 *KE*, p. 124.
179 *KE*, p. 124.

problems are tackled by Eliot in his literary criticism through the impersonal theory of art and the objective correlative.

In 'Hamlet and His Problems' (1919) Eliot asserts that:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[180]

The 'objective correlative' appears as an uneasy *via media* between Bradley and Russell.[181] On the one hand the correlative appears to be a projection of Eliot's account of Bradley's philosophy about the relation between experience (or feeling) and its objects; an account which in Eliot's thesis becomes an inconclusive investigation of the relation between meanings and words, in which he "cannot see any priority of image over emotion, or viceversa."[182] Eliot struggles to untangle the nature of the dichotomy and is only able tenuously to suggest that "there is, if you like, a tendency for emotion to objectify itself."[183]

In the objective correlative Eliot investigates just this tendency; a tendency which becomes of crucial importance in *Hamlet* (according to Eliot, this is what *Hamlet* – both the play and the character – does not manage to do). The correlative attempts to resolve this relation once and for all. In his thesis Eliot affirms that

> The implication is surely mutual, for feeling and image react upon one another inextricably, and the two aspects are so closely related, that you cannot say that the relation is causal.[184]

The objective correlative of 'Hamlet and His Problems' appears to make the causal connection which seems to escape him in his thesis: assumes that the writer always starts with an emotion which has to be expressed, so that "when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" in the reader. In a sense, there is more of Russell's referentialism in this, than Bradley. There is, in fact, an impetuosity about

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180 'Hamlet and His Problems', *SW*, p. 100.

181 In *Skepticism and Modern Enmity: Before and After Eliot*, Jeffrey M. Perl notes that "Eliot surprised, confused, or alienated both sides in the disputes he entered by defending the conclusions of the one in terms appropriate to the other", p. 39.

182 *KE*, p. 116.

183 *KE*, p. 116.

184 *KE*, p. 116.

this essay which expresses what is a fundamental philosophical uneasiness in Eliot's early literary criticism, and in particular with Bradley's theory of objects; that ultimately one cannot account for the exact relation of words to images, objects to feelings from the point of view of metaphysics. It is as if the very style of this essay falls victim of this linguistic insecurity. Eliot combats this insecurity, in 'Hamlet and His Problems', by attempting to concretise the problem in a neat equation. Or, more to the point, by producing his own critical objective correlative to alleviate his philosophical insecurity about Bradley's discourse. He produces an essay which attempts to do what he had to leave open-ended in his thesis.

It is the inconclusiveness of immediate experience which, like a ghost, haunts Eliot's classification of objects in his thesis. Immediate experience is that idealist limbo which will not commit itself to a causal account of the genealogy of cognition. This problem is at the heart of Eliot's investigation of Bradley's concept of immediate experience at the beginning of his thesis – Chapter I: 'On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience'. Immediate experience appears in the philosophy of Bradley as the *inferred* origin of the perceived world of objects. The difficulty lies in the fact that this inference is unknowable. Eliot states that:

> Although there is no stage of life which is more nearly immediately experienced than another [. . .]; although we cannot know immediate experience directly as an object, we can yet arrive at it by inference, and even conclude that it is the starting point of our knowing, since it is only in immediate experience that knowledge and its objects are one.[185]

Yet Eliot has to add that the fact that we use the concept of 'immediate experience' inevitably objectifies something which, by definition, is beyond or prior to conceptualization. The concept of 'immediate experience' itself assumes a referent which, by its very definition, is beyond verification. Immediate experience although explanatory is subject to the very problem it is trying to settle; it is like 'metaphysics' an unreal object. So that, Eliot is forced to admit, "this throws our explanation into the greatest embarrassment."[186] This concept remains an absolute

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[185] *KE*, pp. 18-19.

[186] *KE*, p. 19. In Bradley's own words: "How immediate experience itself can become an object. For, if it becomes an object, it, so far, we may say, is transcended, and there is a doubt as how such transcendence is possible. On the one hand as to the fact of immediate experience being transcended we seem really certain. For we speak about it, and, if so, it has become for us an object. But we are thus led to the dilemma that, so far as I know of immediate experience, it does not exist, and that hence, whether it exists or not, I could in neither case know of it", F. H. Bradley, 'On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience' in *Essays on Truth and Reality*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), p. 160.

– an idealist residue – whose persistence is proportional to the danger of subjective idealism it implies. Because what it implies is that ordinary objects do not exist which are not somehow implicated in what is referred to as hallucinations, imaginary and unreal objects. In short, that there may not be an absolute method of telling the difference between the *experience* of an object and the object itself, because the original experience of the object itself is irretrievable.

The subjectivist implications of immediate experience are attenuated by providing an inferred origin *in experience*, which, by not being immediately available to the subject, cannot be merely a subjective projection. The pre-cognitive experience of Platonic forms is placed in worldly experience. It ensures that the world is, somehow, already there; it lowers the sky as it were. Though irretrievable, immediate experience offers an absolute point of contact between the object and the gaze; so that we may satisfy our demand for a complete object with which, we infer, we have, at some point, had direct contact. However, the correlative contradicts the unknowability of 'immediate experience'; it encourages the objective equivalence between the object and its felt experience which immediate experience makes impossible. This is because the unknowable nature of immediate experience implies that the consciousness of objects automatically dissociates its equivalence with our feelings, due to the fact that being aware of those feelings already reifies the object. Eliot makes this point in his thesis:

> The painting is in the room, and my 'feelings' about the picture are in my 'mind'. If this whole of feeling were complete and satisfactory it would not expand into object and subject with feeling about the object; there would, in fact, be no consciousness. But in order that it should be feeling at all, it must be conscious, but so far as it is conscious it ceases to be merely feeling.[187]

Furthermore, consciousness is, in fact, the result of this post-lapsarian dissociation between feelings and objects. For without this dissociation from the object world the subject would be unconscious of selfhood.[188] Thus conscious feelings cease to be *mere* feelings once contaminated by subjective awareness, yet without which one would not be aware of feelings

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[187] *KE*, p. 20.

[188] "We go on to find that no actual experience could be merely immediate, for if it were, we should certainly know nothing about it", *KE*, p. 18.

in the first place. In the end the dissociation between thoughts and feelings is the price we pay for self-hood.

According to Bradley's immediate experience, in the beginning there was not a word, but a feeling which, in turn, refers to an original moment of contact with the world of objects. Yet, as the world is fallen, this feeling may not have immediate reference to a recoverable object[189] which it can claim to have at its origin with complete certainty. This is a recovery partially achieved through words whose relation to objects is that of conceptualization. In fact, in his thesis, Eliot quotes Christopher Sigwart's *Logic* whose definition of *concept* – as opposed to *idea*[190]- parallels the presumed autonomy of a work of art: '"it is the work of logic to help us to attain to the ideal state in which words represent such Concepts" (*Logic*, vol. I, p. 42)'.[191] Yet, in his thesis, Eliot is reluctant to accept the concept's achievable correlation between words and objects, hence rejects the paralleling of its mechanism with that of the autonomous work of art, simply because he sees the conceptual project of logic as impossible:

> The goal of language is in this sense unattainable, for it is simply that of a complete vocabulary of concepts, each independent of the rest; and all of which, by their various combinations, would give complete and final knowledge – which would be, of course, knowledge without a knower.[192]

Yet the 'correlative' is an attempt to resurrect this conceptual correlation of language with the world. Furthermore, a correlation which, to make matters worse, Eliot now wants to make the measure of art – the point of co-habitation of object and feeling in perfect synthesis.

Armin Paul Frank summarises this cognitive process between feeling and object as two-way. The feeling is provoked by an object to which it must return in order for the feeling to be objectified. Armin notes:

> The projection takes the form of tagging something onto an object that already exists. But insofar as this projection actually and objectively modifies the object perceived, it may be said to be incipiently creative.[193]

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189 The complex relations between ideas, concepts and words are investigated in detail in Eliot's thesis Chapter II 'On the Distinction of *Real* and *Ideal*', *KE*, pp. 44-48.

190 "I define concept as that which a word denotes, and idea as that which a word refers in reality, the reference being contingent", *KE*, p. 46.

191 *KE*, p. 46.

192 *KE*, p. 46.

Armin argues that Eliot's objective correlative is the attempt to see in art the possibility of a unified sensibility[194] between feeling and its objects, and which Bradley could not ultimately reconcile. It is a cognitive-based method of judging art, so that, if this reconciliation is not apparent in *Hamlet*, then, one must conclude, the play is an artistic failure:

> The artistic inevitability lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet.* Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear.[195]

Thus, according to Eliot, Hamlet is unable to correlate his disgust and jealousy for his mother's hasty marriage with the killer of his father – his uncle -, and thus unable to act, let alone react. Or as Armin puts it:

> A person (Hamlet) observes another (Gertrude) whose actions call up certain feelings in the observer which he, however, cannot understand. In order to understand them, he would have to objectify them into "objects of his knowledge."[196]

Eliot's correlative is his own – and not just Hamlet's or Shakespeare's – baffled search for a discourse, which finds its model in the idealized work of art, where thought and feeling coincide.[197]

If Hamlet shows an emotion that exceeds the facts as they appear, Eliot should admit the unknowability of the facts that do not appear: that the immediate experience of the absent facts is "something which is by hypothesis irretrievable"; though it must also have, by the same logic, taken place. Eliot adds:

> We need a great many facts in [Shakespeare's] biography [. . .] We should have, finally, to know something which is by hypothesis unknowable, for we assume it to be an experience which, in the manner indicated, exceeded the facts. We should have to understand things which Shakespeare did not understand himself.[198]

This is, in essence, the paradox of immediate experience, and one which puts in evidence the deficiencies of the correlative as a critical tool and the essay itself. How can one consider an emotion to exceed the facts that appear if we are unable, by definition, to access the ones that

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193 Armin Paul Frank, 'T. S. Eliot's Objective Correlative and the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley', *The Journal Of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 30, no 3 (Spring 1972), p. 316.

194 In terms of T. S. Eliot 'The Metaphysical Poets', a sensibility prior to its dissociation as we shall see later.

195 'Hamlet and His Problems', *SW*, p. 101.

196 Armin Paul Frank, 'T. S. Eliot's Objective Correlative and the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley', p. 313.

197 "Hamlet's bafflement at the absence of objective equivalence to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem", 'Hamlet and His Problems', *SW*, p. 101.

198 'Hamlet and His Problems', *SW*, p. 102-3.

do not in fact appear; facts which the author himself cannot be expected, in the end, to know himself. It is not simply a fault in Shakespeare's work, but an inevitable fault in every form of discourse; a fault, furthermore, to which Eliot himself falls prey precisely at the point when he is trying articulate its resolution. The correlative makes Hamlet's problems inevitable, because it places the stakes of artistic success beyond the reach of practical cognition, hence causing the inevitable failure of the correlative. The correlative idealises art as much as it idealises critical theory's capacity to define it.

Eliot's self-consciousness about the impossibility of the correlative is illustrated by Eliot's own admission that "we should have to understand things which Shakespeare did not understand himself". Shakespeare, like any other knowing subject in a Bradleyan universe, is permanently severed from the immediate experience of knowing : "the *I* who saw the ghost is not the same as the *I* who had the attack of indigestion."[199] And Eliot's correlative is an expression of his own horror at this knowledge[200]; that there are areas of experience which cannot be subjected to the empirical scrutiny of last night's menu, though, by the same logic - if 'logic' is the word -, one may find relief in the causal inference that it was the indigestion that caused the bad dream.

Eliot's search for critical objectification may mirror the outraged Prince's own search for motives and motivation. Consider Eliot's inability to take revenge on Russell – the usurper analytic philosopher – for killing his philosophic father, Bradley, and sleeping with his mother-wife, Vivienne. The correlative is in a sense a submission to Russell's logical referentialism between words and objects, facts and their felt experience. This is a concession Eliot cannot avoid making simply because immediate experience – like the ghost of Hamlet's father– offers Eliot no stable ground on which to defend himself *logically*. It simply cannot survive empirical scrutiny. In a perverse way, Russell fulfils for Eliot a hidden desire to resolve the problem which immediate experience – the ghost – presents, a problem that is driving him

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199 *KE*, p. 121.

200 "The intense feeling, ecstatic or terrible, without an object or exceeding its object, is something which every person of sensibility has known", 'Hamlet and his Problems', *SW*, p. 102.

insane. Thus Eliot goes himself momentarily mad and falls into critical passivity. Eliot cannot bring himself to react to Bradley's (the ghost's) metaphysical warning against scientific analysis, not because he does not believe it, but because Russell's materialism questions its very existence – insofar as there is no room in Russell's epistemology for unreal objects. Ghosts are not worth considering because they simply do not exist. Madness and hallucinations are indeed the only explanatory routes open if you have indeed seen something which is logically inexplicable.

Hamlet's Ghost

The question now is whether Eliot's essay on *Hamlet* falls victim to its own philosophical uncertainties, or whether Eliot's submission to Russell is a clever tactic to expose the latter's own deficiencies. In other words, whether Eliot's philosophical madness – like Hamlet's – can be seen as a deliberate critical strategy. In order to attempt an answer I will offer a critique of *Hamlet* more consistent with the Eliot of *Knowledge and Experience* concerning the classification of objects. I would like to consider the ghost's questionable shape, rather than Gertrude's sexuality, as the immediate experience the objective correlative can not encompass.[201]

The absent facts take two forms: the ghost's report of the assassination, and its re-enactment as a play within a play. These facts are indirect, and are aggravated by the nature of the teller: a ghost. Consequently we are dealing with two kinds of objects: the ghost, as an unreal object and the play within the play, as an imaginary object.[202] If the 'correlative' may be interpreted in terms of Eliot's classification of objects, unreal and imaginary, then Hamlet's

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[201] I am not rejecting psychoanalytic interpretations of the play. In fact, I feel there is an important parallel between Julia Kristeva's distinction between the Semiotic, Thetic and Symbolic and Bradley's Feeling, Immediate experience and Object. See Bradley's 'On the Knowledge of Immediate Experience', *Essays on Truth and Reality* (pp. 171-173), where he deals with the psychological nature of immediate experience in terms of the unconscious, and the role of feeling after its objectification. My point is that the semiotic is problematized principally in the Ghost, and not so much in Gertrude. Even if by doing so we lose the gendered symbolism, so important in later psychoanalytical interpretations, which have been dominating Gender Studies.

[202] We are back in the territory of Eliot's thesis, and particularly in Chapter V: 'The Epistemologist's Theory of Knowledge' (continued): "If the character in fiction is an imaginary object, it must be by virtue of something more than its being imaginary, i.e. merely intending a reality which is not [. . .] The fiction is thus more that a fiction: it is a *real* fiction", *KE*, pp. 123-4.

problem may be said to be his inability to make sense, that is, of the degree of reality of the ghost's fiction; that is to say it does not offer an absolute source of certainty. Hamlet is unable to take the unreality of his father's ghost as *real.* He falls into the passive activity of testing that the ghost is really real, doubting what he, to a degree, already knows.[203] In fact, to start with Hamlet does not doubt the ghost's message as such. Hamlet says: "Touching this vision here,/ It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you."[204] Hamlet becomes trapped in a cognitive decline, from the hypersensitive consciousness of unreal objects to downright distraction. This decline can be tested against the qualitative difference between the first ghost on the battlements and the second ghost in Gertrude's bedroom: the first is unreal but communally experienced, the second is an illusion engaging Hamlet's subjectivity alone in Gertrude's bedroom. Hamlet spirits away the world through his reluctance to face the metaphysics *in* the world. The emotion is in excess of the facts as they appear, insofar as Hamlet, in a state of emotional indulgence, eventually requires no referent for his emotional state, and when they do appear he rejects their suitability. He rejects them because they fail to be final – it is unreal, it is a ghost.

The ghost aggravates the reliability of the message not because the message is difficult to believe, but because the ghostly form it takes accentuates the natural arbitrariness between the spectral signifier and the signified message. This can be contextualized in Chapter II 'On the Distinction of *Real* and *Ideal*' of Eliot's thesis. In it Eliot notes that ideas, unlike concepts, do not have stable referents in the world:

> I define concept as that which a word denotes, and idea as that which a word refers in reality, the reference being contingent.[205]

So that the conceptualising process where ideas can be said to refer to reality may be impeded by its natural discontinuity with it, by its contingency:

> The idea certainly has a sort of existence apart from the reality to which it refers, but the apartness is of a special sort and may easily be misunderstood.[206]

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[203] One may say that Bradley's immediate experience involves the pre-cognitive encounter with an object with which we are re-acquainted through conscious experience; that, as it were, cognition is the objectification of something we have already perceived. Thus the fulfilment of the object world – the compromise between feeling and object – is not so much our confirmed knowledge of its reality, as its being experienced as self-evidence.

[204] The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, 30, *Hamlet*, George Santayana intro. (New York: George D. Sproul, 1908), I, v, ll 137-38, p. 46.

[205] *KE*, p. 46.

Eliot's point is that this apartness should not entail the impossibility of contiguity between ideas and the world, which is undermined by the irretrievability of the immediate experience. Yet the ghost, as unreal object, makes this conceptualization more difficult. It is the concept which encompasses the correlating inertia without which the idea could not attenuate the contingency of its referents in the world.

Not only is the ghost problematic as a present experience, but also involves the interpretation of past events – absent facts – about the murder of the king. Temporal chasms exemplify for Eliot another aspect of the contingency between meaning and reality:

> The contrast between meaning and reality is not so apparent when the reality intended is a present sense perception as in some other cases. In memory, for example, or anticipation, there may be the consciousness of an intended reality and of a present meaning which are not co-existent in time [. . .] To recall feeling we are often told, is merely to live it over; it cannot be known or remembered, but only felt. And to this objection we can retort that hallucination is not the satisfaction and consummation of memory, but its disease.[207]

Re-living the past is as alien as re-capturing immediate experience. Memory only gives the impression of correlation, but can only be invoked as a re-examination. Hamlet's obsession with the ghost's credibility leads him into forcing a continuity between it and its message to the point where he no longer engages with the event as an interpretation. Hamlet's certainty about the ghost's message increasingly insists on the identity between ghost and message. This insistence increases proportionally to his awareness that their correlation is far from perfect; this becomes an absolute cognitive doubt which encourages his increasing distraction and procrastination.

In contrast, Horatio, does not appear to doubt the ghost. Yet he is the first one to describe it as the product of Marcellus and Bernardo's "fantasy" (I, i, l. 23) and as an "illusion" (I, i, l.127) even in the act of perceiving it himself. When Hamlet returns from the meeting with the ghost, Horatio asks for the details of the encounter. After requesting secrecy Hamlet reveals that:

> *Hamlet* : There's ne'er a villain dwelling in Denmark
> But he's an arrant knave.

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206 *KE*, p. 48.
207 *KE*, pp. 49 & 50.

> *Horatio* : There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave
> To tell us this.[208]

Horatio has no problem in relating to the ghost as an event, even if is to say that the ghost is superfluous because its message is self-evident. To admit that much is already to engage with the degree of reality the ghost offers: the ghost as a real fiction – even if Horatio does not strictly *believe* in ghosts. Self-evidence bridges over the gap between the ghost and the message. On the other hand, Hamlet's disposition to believe in this ghost entangles him in an obsessive search for scientific proof, of testing the ghost's message in order to gain absolute certainty; a certainty, which in a metaphysical world inhabited by ghosts, is impossible.

This process of turning the immediate experience, the absent facts offered by the ghost, into an objective correlative is bound to fail, particularly given the radical dislocation between the medium and the message which the ghost entails. This testing is ultimately directed to the ghost's existence, so that the truth or error of the message is linked with the existential status of the ghost. Hamlet's questioning of the message inverts Horatio's response. Horatio may doubt the existence of ghosts but he has no problem believing the message, as the spectral medium legitimises itself verifying Horatio's suspicions that there is indeed something rotten in the state of Denmark. Hamlet denies the ghost its meaningfulness by attempting to pin it down. He treats it like a real object by attempting to equate the ghost with its message; by attempting, in other words, to treat it as an objective correlative.

Hamlet's error is his resistance to the degree of reality the ghost's fiction offers, so that the more he tries to make it real the more it recedes into illusion; the more he insists on the correlation the wider the abyss gapes. Hamlet's problem is a self-imposed skepticism as to what he naturally knows. And it is a feature of radical skepticism secretly to yearn for the relief of absolutes and metaphysics; to believe, in other words, in the supernatural. The last chapter of Eliot's thesis on Bradley is entitled 'Solipsism'. This is symptomatic of Eliot's own existential insecurity as a result of engaging with Bradley's metaphysical philosophy about the

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208 *Hamlet*, I, v, ll. 124-27, p. 45.

impossibility of verifying the identity of our private perceptions with that of others[209]; the insecurity of the knowledge that philosophy cannot give all the answers. As Hamlet notes:

> There are more things in heaven an earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.[210]

The ghost is the metaphysical immediate experience which Eliot, like Hamlet, attempts to exorcise through the correlative. It is the attempt to arrive at an absolute correlation between meaning and reality, feeling and object. If Eliot parallels Hamlet's behaviour, we may also add that Eliot knows better than to chase empirical certainty. Why he attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle; under compulsion of what experience he attempted to express the inexpressibly horrible, we cannot ever know. We may need a great many facts: Bradley's philosophical decline, Russell's affair with Vivienne and his philosophical assassination of Bradley may help but only up to a point. Shakespeare is presenting us with a classic cognitive problem. This is, in Bradley's terms, the struggle to achieve scientific certainty in a metaphysical world of appearances. Eliot's presentation of *Hamlet*'s problem does not entail that the problem is Shakespeare's, but, more likely, Eliot's own. It is worth saying that the correlative is not so much the solution *Hamlet* fails to fulfil, but its inherent problem.

If we now return to 'Hamlet and His Problems' as a whole one can detect Eliot's self-consciousness about the correlative and its problems; mainly the acknowledgement that the correlative depends on facts that remain beyond our critical accessibility. To blame Shakespeare for this lack is to escape the responsibility of acknowledging it as a general cognitive problem and to hope against hope that critical certainty can be found in works of art. The correlative suggests that the critic stay within what is immediately available – that is the work of art – while 'Hamlet and His Problems' hints that what is immediately available is not the whole story. This opens an alternative reading of the essay. Eliot seems to be admitting that the correlative's pretensions of conceptualising meaning prove to be unverifiable. It turns out that the strategy of Eliot's essay is to follow the logic of the correlative to the point where its

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209 "From a point of view completely detached, reality would contain nothing but finite centres and their several presentations; but from the point of view of each centre, there is an objective world upon which several points of view are trained, and to which they all refer", *KE*, p. 142.

210 *Hamlet*, I, v, ll. 166-67, p. 47.

deficiencies reveal themselves; where the inevitability of metaphysics becomes apparent. This manoeuvre may be said to exploit the dislocation between the essay's logical pretensions of the correlative as a formula, and its overall message. Their dislocated relationship is made simultaneously contiguous by revealing the metaphysical pretensions inherent in the conceptual project of logic. This is because any logical correlation between feelings and objects must ultimately appeal, for its verification, to empirical grounds, but which are, as we have seen, simply absent.

Impersonality and the Frontier of Metaphysics

Eliot's philosophical manoeuvres between science and metaphysics are not limited to 'Hamlet and his Problems', but are an implicit theme in his early critical writings. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', as we have already noted above, also appears to promote scientific description as against metaphysical interpretation. In 'Hamlet and His Problems' Eliot asserts that "*Qua* work of art, the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret"[211] and in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' Eliot adds that "it is in this depersonalisation that art may be said to approach the condition of science."[212] And, like 'Hamlet and His Problems', 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' has another ghost to deal with. This ghost is literally 'metaphysics'.[213] Ultimately one can only see and make others see what one saw[214] because consciousness is consciousness of objects.

This conclusion alters any smooth parallels between Eliot's engagement with scientific philosophy and that of Hulme. They both seem attracted by a cognitive based linguistics that are only fulfilled by art. Hulme notes that:

> [The artist] should be a person who is able to emancipate himself from the moulds which language and ordinary perception force on him and be able to see things as they really are.[215]

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211 'Hamlet and His Problems', *SW*, p. 96.
212 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 53.
213 See 'The 'Presentation of Metaphysics' above.
214 "Dante's attempt is to make us see what he saw", T. S. Eliot, *Dante* (London: Faber & Faber, 1929), pp. 24.
215 'Bergson's Theory of Art', *Speculations*, p. 166.

This is a statement which Eliot appears to echo in 'The Perfect Critic' first published in two parts in the *Athenaeum*[216] and then included in *The Sacred Wood*:

> The end of the enjoyment of poetry is pure contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion are removed; thus we aim to see the object as it really is.[217]

But where Hulme sustains his idealization of art as the cognitive fulfilment of language in literature, which he contrasts with prose writing, Eliot's critical prose continuously undermines the absolute cognitive status he attributes to successful literature. This interaction between literature and Eliot's criticism itself acts as a reminder that literature cannot simply be an affair of a poetics acting as absolute scientific model, but of rhetoric, metaphysics and, as we shall see later, belief. This suggests that Eliot is already altering the meaning of *seeing* an object.

Eliot's allusion to the difficulty of meaningfully relocating terms from their original context parallels one of the central concerns in his doctoral thesis: solipsism. Thus in 'The Perfect Critic' Eliot notes that:

> When there is so much to be known, when there are so many fields of knowledge in which the same words are used with different meanings, when every one knows a little about a great many things, it becomes increasingly difficult for anyone to know whether he knows what he is talking about or not. And when we do not know, or when we do not know enough, we tend always to substitute emotions for thoughts.[218]

The problem here is that of the impossibility of justifying meaningful communication beyond the original context in which words are used. Ultimately this original context is subjectivity itself. To say "not only all knowledge, but all feeling, is in perception"[219] is one thing, but to account for the collective agreement about the words we use to communicate those experiences is quite another. How can we ensure the use of a common language when the origins of all our experiences are private feelings? How can we make sure we are all seeing and, hence, meaning the same thing? In Chapter VI, entitled 'Solipsism', of his doctoral thesis Eliot noted:

> Thus we confront the question: how do we yoke our divers worlds to draw together? How can we issue from the circle described about each point of view? And since I can know no point of view but my own, how can I know that there are other points of view, or admitting their existence, how can I take any account of them?[220]

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[216] 'The Perfect Critic [I]', *Athenaeum*, 4706 (July 9, 1920), 40-41 & 'The Perfect Critic II', *Athenaeum*, 4708 (July 23, 1920), 102-104.

[217] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, pp. 14-15.

[218] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 10.

[219] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 10.

[220] *KE*, p. 141.

The only way out of this conundrum for Eliot is to transcendentalize subjectivity to the point where all individual perception coheres in a common encounter with the world of objects; in other words, to radicalise subjectivity to the point where it becomes objective in its finitude. This is a possibility which involves stripping away layers of personality, namely moral and cultural, in order to get to the core of the subject's immediate experience; what Bradley calls the 'finite centre'.

Eliot considered the problem of finite centres in an article he wrote for the *Monist* in 1916, 'Leibniz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centres', also published as the second appendix to his doctoral thesis in 1964. In this article Eliot questions the conclusiveness of the 'finite centre' as well as the impotence of the finite centre to reconcile its claims on finitude, while still claiming for itself objective validity:

> Like monads [finite centres] aim at being one; each expanded to completion, to the full reality latent within it, would be identical with the whole universe. But in doing so it would lose the actuality, the here and now, which is essential to the small reality which it actually achieves.[221]

The problem is not only how the finite centre manages to acquire a monist universality, but how it does so without losing its particular relevance, its *here and now*. Eliot cannot see a solution to this problem other than Bradley's inconclusive suggestion that reality is socially constructed; in other words, if we cannot reconcile particular points of view with a universal point of view, then the possibility of agreement is limited to one which is socially imposed. Even in the case of accepting the idea of a socially constructed world, we still have to deal with the problem of solipsism. The individual does not simply experience publicly; his existence involves the constant reconciliation of the public with his private point of view:

> So, on the one hand, my experience is in principle essentially public. My emotions may be understood better by other people than by myself; as my oculist knows my eyes. And on the other hand everything, the whole world is private to myself. Internal and external are thus not adjectives applied to different contents within the same world; they are different points of view.[222]

This idea finds echo in Eliot's 'The Waste Land':

> *Dayadhvam*: I have heard the key
> Turn in the door once and turn once only
> We think of the key, each in his prison

221 'Leibniz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centres', Appendix II, *KE*, p. 202.

222 'Leibniz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centres', Appendix II, *KE*, p. 204.

> Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison[223]

Eliot glosses these lines with a passage from Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*:

> My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it [. . .] In brief regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is private and peculiar for that soul.[224]

The apparent impossibility of overcoming this absolute privacy finds in Eliot's criticism a search for release by investigating the difficult dividing-line between the public and the private. Eliot thus concludes, that even if this duality is insoluble, one should not confuse the one with the other. That,

> the point of view from which each soul is a world in itself must not be confused with the point of view from which each soul is only the function of a physical organism, a unity perhaps only partial, capable of alteration, development, having a history and a structure, a beginning and apparently an end. And yet the two souls are the same.[225]

The problem is that the mortal body in being separate from the immortal soul, must at the same time claim an inter-relationship. Eliot sees the *soul* as the universal function, and the historical function as *personality* to which the soul is ineffably attached given the difficulty compromising between the finitude of the body and the universality of the soul. This is the ambiguous distinction upon which Eliot insists in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', namely in the statement that: "the point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul."[226] For Eliot there is no easy synthesis out of the body and soul dualism. Instead Eliot finds a way out of the problem by positing a cognitive common ground in perceptual experience, which in its finitude may still claim a universal function claimed by the soul. Eliot calls it *impersonality*. This term attempts to find a universal function at the core of personal embodied experience which can be biologically dissected and scientifically described and thus dissociated from historical and personal subjectivism – i.e. personality and emotions. Impersonality does away with the idea of the soul,

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[223] 'The Waste Land' (1922), ll. 411-414, *T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 79.

[224] 'Notes on the Waste land', *T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems, 1909-1962*, p 86.

[225] 'Leibniz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centres', Appendix II, *KE*, pp. 205-206.

[226] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 56.

and opts for a psycho-physical alternative.[227] The public soul is reconciled with the individual body recast as a *nervous system* in an attempt scientifically to account for a private world which can be agreed upon and be spoken about meaningfully in public.

This premise underlies Eliot's criticism of Philip Massinger in *The Sacred Wood.* Massinger's problem is his cultural over-dependence, which numbs his feelings and turns them into indefinite emotions which fail to be properly communicated. They become historically subjective:

> [Philip Massinger] inherits the traditions of conduct, female chastity, hymeneal sanctity, the fashion of honour, without either criticizing or informing them from his own experience. In the earlier drama these conventions are merely a framework, or an alloy necessary for working the metal; the metal itself consisted of unique emotions resulting inevitably from the circumstances, resulting or inhering as inevitably as the properties of a chemical compound.[228]

Eliot's scientific analogy in 'Philip Massinger' – *Times Literary Supplement*, 958 (May 14,1920), 325-326 – continues the tone of that of the catalyst in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', which appeared in the second part of the essay published in the *Egoist*, vi. 5 (Nov./Dec. 1919). This analogy is used by way of defining the cognitive qualities of the dramatists that came before Massinger, who were able to maintain their perceptual experience autonomous from the cultural world they inhabited.

The subject stripped of culture is indeed reduced to a nervous system; a body in the act of perceiving the object world. The metal, on which the unadulterated finite (nervous) centre works, is the world of objects. *Feelings* constitute the experiential basis of this radical neural personality which, by emphasizing the perception of an external reality of objects, delivers an impersonality unclouded by the *emotions* which otherwise subjectivize feelings as experience is mediated, not through the eyes of the individual, but through those of one's age. Thus, Massinger "was not guided by direct communication through the nerves"[229], indeed he "suffers from cerebral anaemia."[230] The ambiguous message is that Massinger's work is not

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227 This conclusion recalls Bradley's essay 'On the Supposed Uselessness of the Soul' in which Bradley considers the possible meanings of the term 'soul'. Bradley considers that "the soul is somehow an adjective which makes no difference to its substantive", Bradley, *Collected Essays* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 343.

228 'Philip Massinger', *SW*, p. 133.

229 'Philip Massinger', *SW*, p. 136.

230 'Philip Massinger', *SW*, p. 131.

impersonal in its cognitive encounter with the world because he is not *personal* enough; enough to see with his own eyes. Eliot pushes the contradiction to breaking point when he adds that Marlowe's and Jonson's comedies were

> as great literature is, the transformation of a personality into a personal work of art [. . .] Massinger is not simply a personality: his personality hardly exists.[231]

Massinger's style suffers from a deficiency in 'personality'; it is adulterated from within by borrowed views of the world for which he only compensates with personal observations based on his inherited culture. In other words, Massinger is being personal in the wrong way: he "looked at life through the eyes of his predecessors, and only at manners through his own"[232]. The link between language and perception is emphasized by the idea that Massinger's perceptual deficiency translates into a defect in style: "Had Massinger had a nervous system as refined as that of Middleton, Tourneur, Webster, or Ford, his style would be a triumph."[233] Eliot does not quite offer a de-culturation of literature, he simply re-positions culture with respect to the cognitive act to ensure the production of artistic "statements of feeling which are unique and imperishable". He places culture outside as a feeling about an object, which goes hand in hand with making culture an expansive term unlike the reductive understanding Matthew Arnold insisted upon.[234] This reduces culture's exacerbation of the temporal barriers of historical epochs separating finite centres which obstructs their spatio-temporal interpretative coherence.[235] It reduces contextuality to a minimum, so that the transference of meaning from one context to another (be it individuals, intellectual disciplines, or historical periods) is facilitated without the loss of meaning. In the same manner as Massinger, George Wyndham represents the failure of not seeing life with his own eyes, but of embodying a historical period in his very self. Eliot writes in a review of *Essays in Romantic Literature* by George Wyndham ('A Romantic Patrician', *Athenaeum*, 4644 (May 2, 1919), 265-7) reprinted in *The Sacred*

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231 'Philip Massinger', *SW*, p. 139.
232 'Philip Massinger', *SW*, p. 143.
233 'Philip Massinger', *SW*, p. 131.
234 As Pamela McCallum suggest in *Literature and Method: Towards a Critique of I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot and F. R Leavis* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, Humanities Press, 1983): Eliot uses "culture in a much wider sense than the original Arnoldean formulation had implied", p. 113.
235 Eliot addressed this problem as early as 1914 in 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual', a paper delivered at Josiah Royce's seminar (Hayward Bequest, King's College Library).

Wood as 'A Romantic Aristocrat': "Wyndham forgets, in short, that it is not, in the end, periods and traditions but individual men who write great poetry. For Wyndham is himself a period and a tradition."[236] But he is not an individual. And here are the makings of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', which he would publish the following September. The linking of the historical with the perceptual – the idea of impersonality – are also here pre-empted. This historical defect Eliot identifies in Wyndham is akin to a romantic defect in sensibility, so that Wyndham employed his curiosity romantically "not to penetrate the real world, but to complete the varied features of the world he made for himself."[237]

Like the correlative, impersonality idealises the existence of a scientific ground for meaning in cognition, avoiding the solipsistic implications of historical context and metaphysical explanations.[238] Eliot's scientific bias in *The Sacred Wood* encourages depersonalisation as a way of transcending subjective barriers and promoting scientific method. Eliot is unhappy with the smooth combination of physically autonomous bodies – or as Eliot likes to refer in his literary criticism as 'nervous systems' – which yet partake of a universal soul. Eliot has a materialist bias which, in *The Sacred Wood*, insists on avoiding any strictly metaphysical resolutions to the problem of objectivity. The source of all experience is feeling, and, hence, "every vital development in language is a development of feeling as well".[239]

'Feelings' are at the basis of Bradley's account of the experiential encounter with the world. Eliot imports much of Bradley's philosophical vocabulary on human cognition as he transfers the problem to his own examination of poetic and critical style. The theory of impersonality is a variation of Bradley's concept of finite centres which tries to compensate for

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[236] 'Imperfect Critics: A Romantic Aristocrat', *SW*, p. 29.
[237] 'Imperfect Critics: A Romantic Aristocrat', *SW*, p. 31.
[238] It is worth noting that the exclusion of history from Eliot's essays and reviews included in *The Sacred Wood* is provisional in so far as it simultaneously struggles to incorporate it in a form which will not prove to be a cultural horizon blocking the view of seeing the object as it really is throughout the ages. This is the role of the idealized historical order of works of art Eliot refers to as 'tradition'. It amounts to an atemporal historical realm which can be impersonally accessed by shedding one's cultural and subjective trappings. In this sense 'tradition' does not mean 'culture' but a particular atemporal disposition to the past, nothing more. The difficulty of maintaining this position hints at Eliot's hidden wish to deal with history and all its cultural implications but of which he falls short as yet, thought it pre-empts the ground for its eventual inclusion in his later criticism. (Chapter 3 of this thesis will discuss this point further, specially 'The Historical Sense and the Aesthetics of Impersonal Cognition')
[239] 'Philip Massinger', *SW*, p. 129.

its solipsism, or, that we are isolated egos never ultimately sure of the existence of others. That the individual is, as he puts it in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', "Like a patient etherised upon a table."[240] Any thing else is overstepping our cognitive duty, which in this poem is also linked to the stifling boundaries of social manners. Thus Eliot notes in 'The Perfect Critic' that,

> Some writers are essentially of the type that reacts in excess of the stimulus, making something new out of the impressions, but suffer from the defect of vitality or an obscure obstruction which prevents nature from taking its course. Their sensibility alters the object, but never transforms it.[241]

Reacting in excess of the stimulus expands the theme developed in 'Hamlet and His Problems' which he published earlier in the *Athenaeum*[242] also in *The Sacred Wood.* It is also an important point of reference for the second part of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', published about one month later than 'Hamlet and His Problems'. It is in part two that Eliot gives free rain to his scientific analogy of the catalyst, no doubt encouraged by the increasing confidence in the critical vocabulary he was developing. In the statement above Eliot's preoccupation is not so much that the perception of the world is already distorted, but how that distortion can be made coherent with that of others; that is, *transformation* not *alteration.* In itself Eliot's critical style, however much it may seek to depart from Bradley's metaphysics, is entrenched in a scientific version of his philosophy of cognition. In fact Hugh Kenner points to the latent Bradleyanism behind Eliot's critical vocabulary: "'Sensibility' is Eliot's term for scrupulous responsiveness to the Bradleyan 'Immediate experience.'"[243]

There is a clear cognitive bias in Eliot's literary criticism. It is a bias which remains unresolved in *The Sacred Wood.* Impersonality invokes the point of coherence of finite centres in the moment of immediate experience, just like the objective correlative is the poetic synthesis between thought and feeling. Eliot's criticism attempts to re-create that coherence through the use of a scientific style and analogies. Yet Eliot does no more than engage in a rhetorical balancing act. As a whole *The Sacred Wood* is an experiment in criticism, an attempt

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240 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1917), *T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems, 1909-1962*, p 13.

241 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 6.

242 'Hamlet and His Problems', *Athenaeum*, vi. 4 (Sept. 19, 1919), 940-41. A review of *The Problem of Hamlet*, by the Right Hon. J. M. Robertson.

243 *The Invisible Poet* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), p. 53.

to find the impersonal stylistic medium he promotes, to enact the transparency he advocates, and attempts to see it epitomized in the finite centre but which he cannot account for philosophically. The result is, however, far from transparent, and his critico-philosophical vocabulary only appears scientific at the expense of communicability. Eliot seems at times to fall into "that familiar vague suggestion of the scientific vocabulary which is characteristic of modern writing"[244] he himself condemns. The irony is that the success of the essays in *The Sacred Wood* lies in their evocative nature, rather than in their exactitude. Eliot makes a virtue out of necessity by submitting to a scientific style of which he is weary. The result is the reconstruction of a style which recreates the inevitable infiltration of metaphysics into discourse just as the scientific route proves self-sufficient.

The Parody of Science as Critical Style

As we have argued, the correlative is a desperate effort to re-affirm the power of description and avert the solipsistic horror of unverifiable personality and the absolute uncertainty of the knowledge that immediate experience is never merely immediate. It recalls Hamlet's pathetic, if heroic, exclamation: "It is I, /Hamlet the Dane"[245], a last resort to infuse conviction artificially into a discourse in which he cannot believe anymore. It is the death knell of the philosophical discourse as a purely scientific exercise. As if the attempt to resurrect it only finalises its death leaving us where we started, with the ghost of philosophy: metaphysics.

One may concede that this process is the result of Eliot's deliberate stylistic manipulation of logic best seen, for example, in 'Hamlet and His Problems'. The tactic of submitting to the philosophical style – Russell's – which it cannot avoid but which must inevitably parody, echoes Hamlet's behaviour as the means of subverting a court he must inhabit. Hence, Eliot aestheticises the discourse of philosophy by conceiving it as style and evaluating it artistically, as suggested in 'The Possibilities of Poetic Drama', another essay in *The Sacred Wood*:

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244 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 2.

245 *Hamlet*, V, i, ll 251-2, p. 185.

> Certain works of philosophy can be called works of art: much of Aristotle and Plato, Spinoza, parts of Hume. Mr. Bradley's *Principles of Logic*, Mr. Russell's essay on 'Denoting': clear and beautifully formed thought.[246]

Yet, the relationship between philosophy and art remains undecided; whether philosophy is the stylistic model for art or philosophy is rescued as it reaches the poetic status of literary writing is not clearly stated. The failure of the correlative lies in this ambiguity; how is it that literature should not embody, but replace philosophy?[247] As Eliot submits to logic in his early literary criticism, the correlative proves its own worst enemy. As it reveals its scientific shortcomings it becomes an inappropriate model for the evaluation of literature, just as it re-affirms the inescapability of metaphysics.

There is in Eliot's doctoral thesis a yearning for this smooth cognitive inhabitation of the ordinary world where philosophical problems may not to matter:

> I conclude that we can never give an exact description or explanation of the relations of the real world to the unreal. For we have no difficulty with the matter at all till we begin to think (yet this thinking was forced upon us originally by the practical difficulties of illusion).[248]

In theory we assume a dualism which is not felt in life. But if the unexamined life is not worth living we will have to start asking serious questions. And we find that perhaps the biggest obstacle in our path is not the answer, but the possibility of asking the meaningful questions. The correlative imposes on Eliot the task of a precise theoretical expression of artistic practice in 'Hamlet and His Problems', on the assumption that artistic practice can fulfil the conceptual project of science. Yet Eliot had insisted in his thesis that:

> For a theoretical account of the practical attitude would be a description from an outside point of view; and the 'practical' account would give merely the theory of our practice. A theory of practice or a practice of theory would be equally beside the mark: the first inevitably would reduce everything to meaning and the second would reduce everything to denoting. So far as objects are objects, we always intend to denote them, of course; but in practice, they are only objects partially or occasionally, and we cannot decide to what extent.[249]

The most immediate symptom of Eliot's difficulty with his critical account of artistic practice is in his choice of an example which fails positively to illustrate it. *Hamlet* is a negative example, suggesting that, ultimately, Eliot's critical discourse leans, not on the positive logic of Russell,

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[246] 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', *SW*, p. 66.
[247] 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', *SW*, p. 66.
[248] *KE*, p. 138.
[249] *KE*, p. 137.

but on the metaphysical negativity of Bradley. It indicates that Eliot's critical discourse ultimately appeals to rhetorical compensations to make his theory re-enact the absolute correlation one hopes to find in art. Poetics cannot, in the end, justify a logical method in criticism. Ultimately metaphysics cannot be exorcised, demanding instead the deployment of both poetics and logic as rhetorical props in the service of an obscure articulation as literary criticism, a medium then for metaphysical regeneration. In turn literature stops being the descriptive concern of absolute poetics and scientific criticism, but a metaphysical *a priori* at the mercy of a relative world of historical epochs and ineffable literary interpretations. Yet Eliot is not prepared to make this concession despite the problems of *The Sacred Wood*, instead he is already preparing the ground for the development of a discourse which can make subjectivity and metaphysics coexist with the possibility of accurate description. This involves the development of a particular kind of rhetoric poised on incarnating the negative presence of metaphysics as an object of contemplation in the historical world. If Metaphysics will not go away, Eliot gradually incorporates it as an object capable of description in historical and literary terms.

The battle between science and metaphysics is never resolved in *The Sacred Wood*, and the role of philosophy never properly identified. In effect Eliot promotes what he calls the *scientific mind* as a means of rescuing philosophy as a model of critical exactitude and opposes it to impressionistic, or metaphysical, verbosity. Just as Eliot is redefining his preferred philosophical discourse as scientific, he remains conditionally pejorative about philosophy as a reminder of his disenchantment with its metaphysics. In fact, 'Science' embodies Eliot's ambivalence between a disenchantment with philosophy and a need to regenerate its discourse. 'Philosophy' is, in *The Sacred Wood*, a by-word for 'metaphysics', and opposed to 'science'. It is not so much that Eliot discredits 'philosophy' as metaphysics, but that he is unable to articulate directly what this philosophy should be. Thus the 'philosophic' style he is condemning is itself the barrier he has to cross to redeem metaphysical philosophy, for it is this stylistic barrier that stops Eliot short of articulating metaphysics. It is not so much that

metaphysics does not exist, but that the impossibility of its articulation forces Eliot into leaving it out. He opts for absence rather than risk misrepresentation.

Then, just when one thinks Eliot is promoting the concrete style of science, we are unable to find unqualified praise for scientific concreteness:

> If we are allowed to accept certain remarks of Pascal and Mr. Russell about mathematics, we believe that mathematics deals with objects – if he will permit us to call them objects – which directly affect his sensibility. And during a good part of history the philosopher endeavoured to deal with objects which he believed to be of the same exactness as the mathematician's.[250]

Eliot's account of the objective reference of mathematics is itself indefinite, conditioned by the tantalising "if we are allowed to accept . . . " and "if he will permit us to call them objects". It also recalls Eliot's discussion of the classification of objects in his thesis, where he argued that the reality of objects lies not in their equivalence to an absolute referent, but to the *degree* to which they are perceived to be real. It is as if Eliot does not want to push the correlation of objects with mathematics too far; as if he is weary of its stability. The implication is that Eliot is both aware of the excesses of science at the same time that he attempts to promote its example.

Eliot notes at the beginning of 'The Perfect Critic' that criticism may be negatively influenced by science. As Eliot refers to the statement that "poetry is the most highly organized form of intellectual activity", he notices in it "that familiar vague suggestion of the scientific vocabulary which is characteristic of modern writing."[251] The incorporation of scientific vocabulary in criticism may be negative because:

> 'Activity' will mean for the trained scientist, if he employ the term, either nothing at all or something still more exact than anything it suggests to us.[252]

The general *impression* Eliot is evoking is that the negative influence of science in modern criticism reflects back onto the limits of the scientific style itself. Science either means something precisely or nothing at all. The boundary between the two is a tenuous one indeed. Exactitude can indeed overshoot itself, precisely because it can easily break under the strain of

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[250] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 9.

[251] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 2.

[252] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, pp. 8-9.

its rigidity. Eliot is ultimately warning us of the impossibility of borrowing directly from science, that we should not take "for granted that words have definite meanings, overlooking the tendency of words to become indefinite emotions."[253] He is also simultaneously encouraging scientific exactitude just as he re-defines what being scientific should be. Thus Aristotle's exemplary scientific mind is not exactly what we find in what are normally taken to be scientists:

> Aristotle had what is called the scientific mind – a mind which, as it is rarely found in scientists except in fragments, might be better called the intelligent mind.[254]

We expect the scientist to be, not merely intelligent, but informed about the laws of physics, capable of objectively applying them through experiment, and reporting the results according to an exact language. Yet, Eliot never allows the reader to make a direct correlation of the scientific mind with empirical practice, and the philosophic mind with abstract verbalism. That is, Eliot never allows his style to be that scientifically exact. In the end good criticism is a matter of intelligence and "the development of *sensibility*. The bad criticism, on the other hand, is that which is nothing but an expression of *emotion*"[255]. Yet after all that, Eliot may be said to be a little vague, for he is gradually introducing us to a vocabulary of his own, one which assumes a precise emphasis on *emotions*, *feelings* and *sensibility*. But the precision, alas, is but a mirage. One could even go as far as to suggest that Eliot's terminology fails to survive its relocation away from his own critical context. Is this not evidence that Eliot is falling into the very problem he identifies in science, that these terms mean "either nothing at all or something still more exact than anything it suggests to us"? Ultimately, the self-conscious treatment of these issues in the essay may justify the view that Eliot is parodying the scientific style he is promoting. Irony is after all the last line of defence of the non-believer before conceding to meaninglessness.

Habib has argued that irony is Eliot's principal rhetorical device to reconcile opposing philosophical positions in his postgraduate papers and notes on philosophy:

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[253] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 9.
[254] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 13.
[255] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 15.

> [The synthesis between the particular and the universal] had dissolved into a scientific atomism and disconnected particularism on the one side, and an abstract monistic unity on the other, whose mutual dislocation can be viewed as a condition of irony, the most comprehensive name for that impasse.[256]

Habib is suggesting that Eliot was already, in his student days, seeking for alternative discourses to by-pass the problems he was encountering in philosophy:

> Indeed, it is arguable that the early Eliot withdrew the burden of philosophy wholly into the aesthetic realm having despaired of philosophy's potential, he turned to poetry and to literary criticism to establish models of tradition, myth and language which would reaffirm the contemporary world's last connection with past archetypes of unification.[257]

Irony is, for Habib, the medium of reconciliation of discourse which culminates in "the unification of the experiential potential of poetry with the totalizing powers of philosophy"[258]. Irony becomes a form of synthesis, which yet refuses a simple transcendent fusion because its mechanism is based precisely in the impossibility of the project it attempts to solve; it is alleviatory. It is a mode which, for Habib, amounts to a defence against "the bourgeois reduction of the world to an endless present, comprising a vast realm of unconnected particulars whose secrets would yield themselves up only to positivistic science."[259] More importantly Habib adds that Eliot's irony is not philosophically neutral, but represents a metaphysical bias in the face of the onslaught of the sciences[260]; irony is "the index of a metaphysical attitude."[261] It is perhaps this hidden point of resistance that is at work under the surface of Eliot's apparent concessions to the sciences in *The Sacred Wood.* His resistance is hidden precisely because it is metaphysical; because metaphysics refuses the articulation which could stand confrontation in open field. In a sense, this irony is a form of defeat prior to Eliot's further allegorization of metaphysics and rediscovery of philosophy via his ongoing literary criticism and specially his treatment of the Metaphysical poets as we shall see later. Habib gives some idea of this alternative avenue in terms of Eliot's model of 'metaphysical' poetry:

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256 M. R. A. Habib, *The Early T. S. Eliot and Western Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 13.

257 Habib, p. 25.

258 Habib, p. 31

259 Habib, p. 31

260 In chapter 5: 'Eliot, Bradley and the irony of 'common sense', Habib, sees Bradley as an important source in Eliot's use of irony: "What seems to have been neglected in the main critical studies of Eliot and Bradley is this irony which Eliot locates at the very basis of Bradley's 'common sense', which simultaneously offers two visions of the world, forced into an uneasy and unreconciled coexistence: idealist and monist on the one hand, and empiricist, pluralist and realist on the other", p. 127.

261 Habib, p. 37.

> Modern poetry must be metaphysical precisely to the extent that it may need to engage in a search for [unified philosophical systems]. It must confront the same chaos as modern philosophy, returning to the same experiential roots; but it must offer its insights not as the content of contemporary philosophy refracted through the verse but as sublimated into the formal texture itself of poetry.[262]

This reminds us of Eliot's statement that a work of art should not embody philosophy, it "should *replace* the philosophy."[263] What exactly Habib means by sublimating an empty philosophy into the formal texture of poetry is perhaps a little dangerous because it lends itself to be taken as an embodiment. Eliot's criticism is on far safer ground. This is the reason for my interest in criticism rather than poetry in this thesis. It is the critical replacement of philosophy which is the motive behind Eliot's project of developing an alternative discourse to voice metaphysics; that is, this project does not necessarily involve poetry alone but the development of a new kind of critical discourse which may make this transition possible in the first place. This is a project which adopts poetic expression in Eliot's verse, but is more clearly present in Eliot's struggle with the style of criticism. This struggle starts with the apparent rejection of metaphysics – and with it of philosophy as a whole -, but which also is subverted from the inside if only to begin to open a space for metaphysics through a new kind of critical discourse.

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262 Habib, p. 27.

263 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', *SW*, p. 66.

Chapter 3

Eternal History and the Cultural Self

Eliot's scientific flirtations are modified by 'The Metaphysical Poets' (*Times Literary Supplement*, 1031 (Oct. 20, 1921), [669]-670), where an increasing commitment to historical detail begins to take shape. This stage is marked by the articles written immediately after the publication of *The Sacred Wood* indicating an increasing interest in seventeenth-century Metaphysical poetry, such as 'The Second Order Mind' (*Dial*, 69, no 6 (Dec. 1920), 586-589) and 'Andrew Marvell' (*Times Literary Supplement*, 1002 (March 31, 1921), [201]-202). Of these 'The Metaphysical Poets' is the clearest point of departure from the scientific historicism of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' where Eliot had subjected history to his cognitive experiment of impersonality, in turn inspired by 'Hamlet and His problems'. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' fantasises about positing Bradley's immediate experience as a metaphysical inference firmly established in the world. It is an ideal historical realm of works of art, which he calls Tradition. Here meanings and words come together in an unadulterated object of contemplation, and selves cohere in their impersonal perception of the "emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet."[264] This distinction between the object of contemplation and personal history illustrates Eliot's ongoing reluctance as yet to engage with the idea of cultural identity. That is, to work with subjectivity at a pure cognitive level of perception rather than get entangled in the problem of cultural variations and historical epochs which the selves inhabit.

Eliot's statement that "historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence"[265] wilfully folds diachrony into synchrony. Eliot avoids any real engagement with history and his theory of tradition demands a historical simultaneity which leaves very little to what one normally understands by 'history'. Therefore, it is not surprising that Eliot warns that: "I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely

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[264] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 59.
[265] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 49.

historical, criticism"[266]. Impersonality attempts to address the existence of an objective perceptive core in individual experience. This perceptual essence appears to be fulfilled by a particular type of experience: the aesthetic. The problem is that it entails a vision of history and the historical subject devoid of cultural barriers, so as to make possible an idea of objective finitude.

Tradition does not amount to history, but its denial. For Eliot 'history' is a by-word for the barriers of space and time, which tradition projects into an eternal parallel dimension of works of art. This chapter will argue that Eliot's literary criticism is not by-passing the problems of cognition in ordinary experience – to which he had devoted much of his doctoral thesis -, but that aesthetics simplifies the articulation of those philosophical problems by providing a stable historical ground of universal works of art. What is significant is that Eliot attempts a historicism in the first place given his misgivings about the relativity of time. This attempt is, however, symptomatic of a commitment to a historicism which gradually opens up to the problem of trans-historical meaning as a parallel case to the spatial isolation of the ego and the inaccessibility of immediate experience. This move transgresses the scientific paradigms with which Eliot attempts to re-create an absolute historical poetics in *The Sacred Wood.*

The Historical Sense and the Aesthetics of Impersonal Cognition

Eliot's grappling with the obstacle of temporality and the transmission of meaning across the ages does not really commit his literary criticism to the full implications of history. 'History' simply remains, in *The Sacred Wood*, a synonym for cognitive, rather than cultural, *time*, in a way that reflects the tone of his doctoral thesis:

> The contrast between meaning and reality is not so apparent when the reality intended is a present sense perception as in some other cases. In memory, for example, or anticipation, there may be the consciousness of an intended reality and of a present meaning which are not co-existent in time. The reality is there, and the 'mental state' here. And in as much as this present state may omit the greater part of what was present to the reality which is remembered [. . .] we are accustomed to form in the imagination the notion of a perfect idea of the past experience identical in content with the experience itself, and differing only in that it is present as a memory instead of past as an experience.[267]

266 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 49.

267 *KE*, pp. 49.

The only difference between this idea and Eliot's 'historical sense' in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) is that this pessimism about the recoverability of the past – the inevitable distortion of that immediate experience – is transformed into a historical possibility. What in the thesis is only an imaginary mental habit, becomes, in the 'historical sense', a *real* possibility. History is no longer the nightmare from which Eliot is trying to awake, but becomes, through an understanding of tradition, a coherent, if absolute, temporal realm. Here the present's interpretation of an immediate experience in the past need not be a distortion as much as a positive re-ordering:

> The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered [. . .] and this is conformity between the old and the new [. . .] the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.[268]

The individual writer is, as it were, empowered with the ability to participate in the pre-order of history and renews its universal appeal. Yet this individual talent is conditioned by the historical determinism of having as his materials that over which he has no choice: what he inherits from the past. Originality is thus subjected to the subtleties of theological free will, which like Eliot's article on *vers libre,* can only be meaningfully *free* when it is not absolutely so.[269] This is the necessary limitation which provides an objective ground to perception. It ensures that the result is the creative re-ordering of the world and not a subjective distortion. This objective ground, however, is available at the expense of the real world. Tradition simplifies the problem of reconciling distortion with re-ordering by providing, instead of ordinary objects, works of art which already presume a simplified relation between their objective and subjective dimensions realized in their historical universality. Pamela McCallum traces this idea to Bradley's conception of reality, which it always understands in synchronic terms, leaving out diachronic considerations:

> Reality, as described in *Knowledge and Experience*, is synchronic: in Bradleyan terms everything is frozen into both the undifferentiated structurally identical unity of immediate experience and the unapproachable purity of the Absolute. It follows that such a notion will tend to nullify or overlook any particular social milieu, preferring instead a pseudo-totality which has been detached from temporal specificity. Moreover, if

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268 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 50.

269 "The ghost of some simple metre should lurk behind the arras in even the 'freest' verse; to advance menacingly as we doze, and withdraw as we rouse. Or, freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation", 'Reflections on *Vers Libre'* (1917), *SP*, pp. 34-35.

> diachronic movement is disregarded, no genuine experience of partiality, fragmentation or alienation can even be conceived.[270]

Tradition excludes history as culture because culture is relative to time and space. However, Eliot's Tradition does not merely ignore culture's impact over a synchronic vision of history, it also attempts to find a language where absolute critical statements are possible. Yet, while his criticism appears to illustrate a tight logic, it simultaneously offers ambiguities that expose the compromises he makes for the sake of critical exactitude. McCallum sees this critical dimension of ambiguity played out particularly by his poetry; through its vision of "a phenomenology of the fractured, disintegrating existential reality within the modern social mileu"[271], a fragmentation which also progresses towards compensation and coherence. Thus,

> The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
> Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
> Or other testimony of summer nights.[272]

Note that the river is *not* full of rubbish, but the negation goes almost unnoticed invoking *de facto* the opposite effect. This poetic allusion to fragmented experience haunts the very possibility of the ideal historicism where the fragments have been put together, but also that there may be no fragments. Hence, there is no memory of summer nights, yet, simultaneously, a transcendent confidence that they have taken place; that the fragments have been there, even if, by now, they have been washed away to other shores. This is what the criticism wants to fulfil by going beyond the nature of these verses which can only evoke a half-realized and undecided wish between memory and forgetfulness. In Eliot's criticism Tradition attempts to positively articulate the *re-ordering* of experience. Tradition attempts, as much as it can, to deal with the workings of ordinary cognition – the limits of never being able to recall the original experience in the past – while it posits the possibility of controlling this distortion in some areas of experience, namely the aesthetic experience. For Eliot originality becomes the uneasy reconciliation between artistic universality and its necessary rooting in the world of fragmented experience. The suspicion is that Tradition reduces this world of experience to the aesthetic,

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270 Pamela McCallum, *Literature and Method: Towards a Critique of I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot and F. R Leavis* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, Humanities Press, 1983), p. 123.

271 McCallum, p. 124.

272 'The Waste Land', III. The Fire Sermon, ll. 177-179, *Collected Poems*, p. 170

whose historical dimension it fails to fulfil in his criticism and which McCallum identifies with the Classical moment of *stasis*: "Hence real lived experience and history are denied, imprisoned in the closed formal order of the metaphoric organism."[273] This critical struggle, however, pre-empts his later statement in 1928 that "the poem which is absolutely original is absolutely bad; it is, in the bad sense 'subjective' with no relation to the world it appeals."[274] The ambiguity lies in Eliot's inability to identify the *world* to which this poem is appealing. Is it the world of objects, a particular historical moment or simply the world of letters? 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' bases the 'historical sense' on this ambiguity which postpones the decision, just as it opens up a place for further inclusions.

The immediate difficulty with this position is that once we accept that being traditional amounts to the participation and re-ordering of a given world not immediately available, one cannot easily tell the difference between re-ordering and distortion. This distinction is proposed in Eliot's doctoral thesis as the difference between memory and hallucination:

> To recall feeling, we are often told, is merely to live it over; it cannot be known or remembered, but only felt. And to this objection we can retort that hallucination is not the satisfaction and consummation of memory, but its disease.[275]

Hallucination amounts to the unchecked belief in the complete recuperation of the past which bypasses the discriminating nature of memory. Hallucinations do not stress the presence of the past to us through memory, but the fantasy of by-passing temporality and accessing it just as it was. This inverse proportionality between memory and hallucination finds its literary expression in the fact that, as Eliot puts it in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent',

> we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.[276]

The more we try directly to recuperate the past experience, to copy past masters, the more we distort the artistic essence and the historical conformity. The universal value of the work of art is thus theoretically temporalized. Our relation to tradition should involve a resistance to its

273 McCallum, p. 124.

274 'Introduction', Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems* (1928) (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 10.

275 *KE*, pp. 49 & 50.

276 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 48.

inevitable influence which paradoxically delivers the proper participation to it by making evident the temporal barriers which separate us. Eliot articulates the distinction between these two attitudes with the famous aphorism that "immature poets imitate; mature poets steal."[277]

Eliot's strategies are important because they gradually defy one's natural objections to being *traditional* understood as the impossibility of the new; they check the inference that we are condemned to repeat ourselves eternally in a hallucinated trance. Equally, Eliot's tradition controls the idea of history as a mere meaningless continuum which must end in subjectivism and solipsistic loneliness[278]. In other words, Eliot is not simply idealizing a tradition which synthesises all time into a meaningful order eternally present, but he is also struggling to leave room for the passing of time, without falling into the trap of either idealism or positivism. The cognitive historicism of the thesis is, after all, very like the aesthetic historicism of *The Sacred Wood*. The difference is that Eliot's doctoral thesis makes concessions to the irretrievability of the past which his literary criticism is attempting to attenuate. Tradition attempts to use the work of art as a ground for cognitive experience in history, yet he struggles to halt at the frontier of metaphysics to avoid implying a transcendental aesthetic order which would neutralize the little history Tradition has about it. Thus Eliot tries to turn the skepticism of his thesis into optimism in his literary criticism.

Eliot's concept of Tradition is an attempt to articulate the intuition that objective historical judgement can only be clearly stated at the expense of a culturally thematized history, in this case, partially idealized as a parallel aesthetic realm of works of art. This realm attenuates the clash between finite history and artistic universality; culture is, after all, the obvious enemy of universal meaning. Tradition homogenises the inevitable diversity of historical and personal contexts of meaning. It does not reject contextualization, it simply insists on an overarching one for everyone, a context which transcends the solipsistic finitude of particular cultural features and personality. For Eliot, the problem lies in avoiding making

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277 'Philip Massinger', *SW*, p. 125.

278 Eliot is here very much aware of the Bergsonian pitfalls of the *elán vital*. See 'Bergson Resartus and T. S. Eliot's Manuscript', M. R. A. Habib, *The Early T. S. Eliot and Western Philosophy*, pp. 39-60.

tradition function as Bradley's Absolute: in effect, a desperate attempt to appeal to metaphysics in the absence of an alternative way of reconciling different points of view. This is most apparent in Eliot's introduction to *The Sacred Wood*:

> It is part of the business of the critic to preserve tradition - where good tradition exists. It is part of his business to see literature steadily and to see it whole; and this is eminently to see it *not* as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time; to see the best work of our time and the best work of twenty-five hundred years ago with the same eyes.[279]

For what is a better alternative to an absolute metaphysical context of history than the idealized coherence of individual perception which depends, not on cultural and personal identity, but on one's eyes and nervous systems unhindered by the passing of time? Culture may change but the eyeballs remain physiologically the same. Historical finitude becomes perceptual and thus synchronic, if we choose to believe that aesthetic experience, unlike ordinary cognition, is less subject to cultural changes through time. Thus Eliot's Tradition does not seek an objective ground either in culture or metaphysics but, instead, in cognition modelled around the impersonal perception art fosters. Yet Tradition and Impersonality are not merely romantic idealization of aesthetic experience, but the contextualization of aesthetics in the very problems of cognition it is trying to solve – namely, subjectivity and objectivity. These are indeed Romantic concerns which Edward Lobb very much tries to make explicit. However, Eliot's attempt at their resolution is at the expense of appearing to by-pass them, by hiding behind scientific accounts of cognition. He is indeed working with Romanticism, but it is precisely his awareness of it that forces the more radical a break. Lobb is good in saying that "Eliot found within the Romantic poets themselves, then, most of the ideas which he used in his critique of Romanticism"[280], yet he seems to underestimate the critique he is pointing out because, it seems, he is not fully aware of subtle cognitive issues at work in Eliot's criticism. Lobb's statement is in fact a licence to interpret everything about Eliot in terms of Romanticism.

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279 'Introduction', *SW*, p. xv-xvi.

280 Edward Lobb, *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 74.

David Goldie argues that Eliot's theory of impersonality is the continuation of the symbolist concern with the 'natural sin of language'[281], an attempt to recuperate the unadulterated medium of perception as the means to deliver a perfect style. Rémy de Gourmont's *Problème du Style* (1902) promotes this concern, and his example is taken up by the Eliot of *The Sacred Wood.* The 'problem' is the gradual deterioration of literary language as it passes from reader to reader, from epoch to epoch, which translates into a concern with the instability of the very language used in the criticism about literature. Goldie is aware of this critical instability which Eliot seeks to alleviate in his early criticism through Gourmont:

> For a writer like Eliot English critical writing on style had little to offer and for a certain time he clearly believed that continental writers – in particular the French poet and critic Rémy de Gourmont – marked a way out of a debilitating Anglocentric critical impressionism.[282]

Eliot's impersonal theory of art promotes a radical personality rooted in sense perception. This radicalization aims at universalizing what would otherwise be private experiences. Eliot is not rejecting personality but he is redefining it. It is an exploration of Gourmont's stress on the importance of personality in style. However, in Gourmont personality leaves no room for tradition. The stress is purely on the uncontaminated cognitive act. According to Goldie:

> The idea of a formative literary tradition, for which Eliot was reaching, is untenable for Gourmont, for which it is axiomatic that what is taught by literature is posterior, and secondary, to what is learned through the senses, and for whom literary history is merely a collection of individual and frequently unrelated utterances of personal feeling collected together and homogenised, as it were, after the fact.[283]

Eliot is not unaware of the distorting element of history, and, like Gourmont, attempts to re-establish the primacy of the sense experience. The main difference between the two is Eliot's philosophical background, without which Gourmont's idealization of the pure cognitive act is naive. Thus, it is not that Eliot's historicism is limited that is significant, but that, in the context of Gourmont's rejection of literary tradition, he felt the need to develop a historical legitimization for cognition in the first place. That Eliot shies away from the relativism of its cultural implications – that statements of truth should be kept away from affirmations of

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[281] David Goldie, *A Critical Difference: T. S. Eliot and John Middleton Murry in English Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 73.

[282] Goldie, p. 69.

[283] Goldie, p. 78.

cultural dogma – in his early criticism is thus secondary to the greater project of up-dating the critical discourse to make that inclusion possible.[284]

Eliot's introduction to *The Sacred Wood* is not a simple anti-cultural statement. In the introduction Eliot attacks Matthew Arnold's 'The Function of Criticism in the Present Time' and, in particular, its idealization of cultural epochs and its criticism of the present state of culture: the idea that the present does not measure up to the ideal cultural conditions which encourage good creative activity. Arnold states that:

> The exercise of the creative power in the production of great works of literature or art, however high this exercise of it may rank, is not at all epochs and under all conditions possible; and that therefore labour may be vainly spent in attempting it, which might with more fruit be used in preparing for it, in rendering it possible.[285]

Eliot, however, does not to disagree with Arnold on all counts. Like Arnold, Eliot stresses the importance of criticism in the creative process: the idea that criticism, in Arnold's words, permeates society with "fresh thought, intelligent and alive."[286] Where Eliot disagrees is in that this permeation is only rarely available, and that "this is why great creative epochs are so rare." Eliot's dissent is not absolute, but he cannot assent to Arnold's moral high ground and cultural determinism. Arnold's message amounts to a condemnation of humanity to its lot, implying that there is no point trying to create when the conditions of one's present are not ready for great literature. Eliot would admit that the present situation is not ideal, as he pointed out to Sydney Schiff in January 1920:

> We have in modern society a huge journalistic organism the "critical" or Review press which must be fed – there is simply not enough, nowhere near enough, good creative work to feed the "critical" machine.[287]

However there is a determined optimism to make the best of things when Eliot wrote the introduction to *The Sacred Wood* in the very same year:

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[284] In *A Critical Difference*, Goldie goes on to shows how John Middleton Murry complained that Eliot was artificially separating aesthetics from culture, but argues that the debate was really about the very meaning of culture itself. See Goldie, pp. 60-68.

[285] Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1969) in *Essays by Matthew Arnold: Including 'Essays in Criticism' (1865), 'On Translating Homer' and Five Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 9-36 (p. 11).

[286] Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', p. 14.

[287] To Sydney Schiff (12th January, 1920), *Letters*, pp. 355-356.

> The periodical press [. . .] is an instrument of transport; and the literary periodical press is dependent upon the existence of a sufficient number of second-order [. . .] minds to supply its material. These minds are necessary for that "current of ideas", that "society permeated by fresh thought," of which Arnold speaks.[288]

For Arnold, literary criticism is not a practical pursuit and should be kept separate from practical life. For Eliot, Arnold's position amounts to creative passivity which becomes a waiting game for the right conditions to arrive from a critical position of moral aloofness. Arnold did not take the literary production of his time seriously; he was "not occupied so much in establishing a criticism as in attacking the uncritical."[289] Thus, Eliot concludes, Arnold preferred "to put literature in the corner until he cleaned the whole country first". Eliot, instead, encourages participation in the 'current of ideas' through active criticism, whatever his opinions to Sydney Schiff might have been a few months earlier. The twist is that Eliot concedes the point to Arnold just as he expands what is meant by "current of ideas", of which Arnold speaks.

The Sacred Wood is in fact a collection of reviews and essays which had already been published in the periodical press. The paradox is that its contents are only formally a concession to popular culture, given that, contextually, they tend to condition – and perhaps are even about – the extent to which cultural participation should be carried out. Just as, even then, Eliot is characterized by non-committal rhetoric about cultural participation exemplified by statements such as "[Philip Massinger] looked at life through the eyes of his predecessors, and only at manners through his own."[290] Is he saying the reverse is true; that one should *look* at the manners of one's time in the frame of the Tradition and *look* with one's own eyes at life? What exactly is the difference between life and manners? The answer is enigmatic, but what is clear is that this distinction is inherently looking for an overlap between perceptive (look), ordinary (life) and cultural (manners) experiences, which also translates into the seeking for an, as yet undetermined, historical overlap between what is contemporary and what is universal. There is an Arnoldean withholding after all. The subtext to Eliot's introduction to *The Sacred Wood* amounts to a beckoning to an all-embracing culture which, however, is left waiting at the

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288 'Introduction', *SW*, p. xiv.
289 'Introduction', *SW*, p. xiii.
290 'Philip Massinger', *SW*, p. 143.

door; the caution is Arnoldean only up to a point. Eliot hesitates to offer high culture as a model for the Tradition he envisages. The kind of participation which, in the end, *The Sacred Wood* wants to encapsulate is both contemporary and universal, popular or highbrow. Eliot brings culture and society closer than Arnold would allow for, something McCallum sees as in tune with Bradley's critique of Arnold on this count.[291] If Arnold's function of criticism ever acted as a model for Eliot as Lobb suggests,[292] it begins to run thin once a comprehensive understanding of culture becomes an important factor for the understanding of history in Eliot's criticism. This is the point where culture begins to cry out for definition.

If culture was left tentatively implied in the original edition of*The Sacred Wood*, it is openly acknowledged in its Preface to the revised 1928 version:

> At the time I was much stimulated and much helped by the critical writings of Rémy de Gourmont. I acknowledge that influence and I am grateful for it; and I by no means disown it by having passed on to another problem not touched upon in this book: that of the relation of poetry to the spiritual and social life of its time and of other times.[293]

Eliot exaggerates his "having passed onto another problem not touched upon in this book"; in fact *The Sacred Wood* is about the relation of poetry to the spiritual and social life of its time and other times from the start. That it offers no unproblematic solution is another matter. If the 'second-order mind' holds the key to Eliot's re-definition of culture[294] it is already partially incorporated into his early criticism. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' keeps high culture at bay opting instead for a clean-cut emphasis on cultural impersonality and cognitive primacy. Philip Massinger's style is criticised for a cultural over-dependence because it undermines its universal cognitive appeal and thus restricts its participation in Tradition; yet it also suggests that this participation is dependent on one's relation to one's time. This is related to the cultural

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291 "There can be no doubt that Bradley has consigned the traditional metaphoric meaning of culture – cultivation or education – to latent qualities or tendencies to be developed", McCallum, p. 112.

292 See Lobb, pp. 75-78.

293 Preface to the 1928 Edition, *SW*, p. viii.

294 This hidden motive is finally developed in Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) (London: Faber and Faber, 1962). The interest of this book resides not only on its subject matter, but on its methodology – "My aim is to help to define a word, the word *culture*" (p. 13) – which recalls Eliot's interest in the limits of definition as a scientific pursuit illustrated in his post-graduate notes on 'Description and Interpretation' which we looked at in Chapter 2 of this thesis ('Description and Interpretation'). The aphorism at the top of the book's introduction reads: "I think our studies ought to be all but purposeless. They want to be pursued with chastity like mathematics (Acton)" (p. 13). Also see Edward Lobb's *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition* (Routledge & Kegan Paul; London, 1981), p117.

primacy of the second-order mind which Eliot re-affirms in the 1928 Preface. The point is to make cultural specific literary expressions open up critically to a wider historical horizon. The scientific materialism, which prevails in the essays of *The Sacred Wood*, is gradually opened up from the inside, via the Introduction and Preface, to let both culture and metaphysics in – each of which stand for historical finitude and universality. The culmination of this process is allegorized in 'The Metaphysical Poets' only a year later.

The Collective and the Individual in Critical History

'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921) continues Eliot's momentum towards the incorporation of culture into his critical thought by subjecting the cognitive impersonality of Tradition to a historical epoch, in this case, the seventeenth-century. This shift is already prefigured in Eliot's 1920 Introduction which concludes with an extended quotation from Dr Johnson's *Life of Cowley*, which was the centre piece of 'The Metaphysical Poets'. In this essay Eliot is not merely detailing the cognitive mechanisms of these poet's impersonal 'nervous systems', but contextualizing them within historical epochs. The 'dissociation of sensibility', which in 'The Metaphysical Poets' is a defining point in Eliot's critical shift, attempts to incorporate the vocabulary of cultural history into the prevailing scientific nomenclature of *The Sacred Wood*. This move towards cultural historicism is implied in the following statement in 'The Metaphysical Poets': "In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered."[295] Dating is in itself an important step. It places the finite centre – the poet – in historical time. Yet this historical commitment is still undermined by the negativity of the formulation. It does not tell us when the association – whose components, thought and feeling, give away its cognitive nature – takes place but when it ceases to exist. Even then the dissociation of sensibility remains a suspended historical assumption. Although historically located through the implication previously in the article that "the poets of the seventeenth century (up to the Revolution) were the direct and normal development of the preceding age"[296], one is left to correlate the bracketed 'up to the Revolution' with the exact

[295] T.S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', *SP*, p. 64.

[296] 'The Metaphysical Poets', *SP*, p. 63.

point at which the dissociation sets in the seventeenth-century, hence marking the end of Metaphysical poetry. Furthermore, one must assume that these seventeenth century poets (up to the Revolution) are indeed all Metaphysical – and none after. Given that Eliot is in fact attempting to find a way of defining these poets historically, these half assumptions gives away the deficiency of the method he is trying on: that the dissociation is anything but a fixed historicism.

Yet, the dissociation of sensibility remains consistent with Eliot's scientific engagement in *The Sacred Wood*: the attempt to validate our perceptions by measuring them against their source in sense experience. Yet at the point in which this validation steps out of merely sensory experience it reveals its historical short-comings. The attempt to place in history the immediacy of perception encouraged by impersonality meets with an unacceptable idealism about a lost time which may never be recovered. Instead Eliot articulates this inference negatively and refuses to define it. The Metaphysical poets are not examples of ideal artistic success; they "were, at best, engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling."[297] This is a task that recalls the objective correlative, but which is no longer posited as an achievable event but as an ideal goal not immediately available in what is, ever since sometime in the seventeenth-century, a dissociated age of sensibility.

For Goldie, the dissociation of sensibility is part of a collective post-war "manifestation of reconstructive disillusion"[298]; or more importantly, a reconstruction focused on the past in the face of the uncertainty of the future. Goldie is, however, careful not to see Eliot's historicism simply as part of a Symbolist project, a project which, as Frank Kermode sees it, sought historically to legitimise the image as a trans-historical artistic feature. In *The Romantic Image* Kermode's argument is that the role of dissociation, encouraged by critics such as Eliot, was to

> show poets a specially appropriate way of nourishing themselves from the past [. . .] the need was to bring literary history [. . .] to the support of the image; to re-write the history of poetry in Symbolic terms.[299]

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297 'The Metaphysical Poets', *SP*, p. 65.

298 Goldie, p. 49

299 Frank Kermode, *The Romantic Image* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 138.

Goldie concludes that Eliot's critico-literary development is underlined, not so much by Symbolism or traditionalism alone, but by his increasing concern with positing the cognitive subject in a cultural context, a community of interpretants. This is a move which is connected with a shift in Eliot's critical discourse; from the scientifically conceptual to the culturally thematized. It is the shift initiated by Eliot's abstracted sense of tradition, which now moves to the increasingly history-bound dissociation of sensibility in 'The Metaphysical Poets'.

Eliot's concept of impersonality as it stands in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' cannot cater for the reconciliation between history and culture; a reconciliation that involves a definition of culture not available to Eliot at that time. Human experience is reducible to that of nervous systems only to the extent that there is an over-arching synchronic realm of works of art in which all these finite centres might cohere. The point is to offer a realm of works of art which are not culturally specific, or else this whole theory of coherence between finite centres falls down into the abyss of historical relativism and individual solipsism. This critical ellipsis, however, endangers the very practical utility of the theory. As Eliot puts it in his thesis:

> Beyond the objective worlds of a number of finite centres, each having its own objects, there is no objective world. Thus we confront the question: how do we yoke our divers worlds to draw together? how can we issue from the circle described about each point of view? and since I can know no point of view but my own, how can I know that there are other points of view, or admitting of their existence, how can I take any account of them?[300]

Eliot's reworking of Bradley's finite centre as a perceptual finitude, only works on the premise that it inhabits a world of accessible objects, unhindered by time or space. This premise is re-created by a tradition projected onto a realm of universal works of art. Thus impersonality is hard-pushed to survive in the temporal world of history. As a consequence, Eliot gets caught between two irreconcilable axes: the historically general and the culturally particular. Goldie identifies them as, on the one hand "the idea of a common culture defined nationally, or by language, and on the other an aesthetic and humanistic sensibility that transcends narrow national and historical boundaries."[301] Eliot's concept of tradition lacks particular definition: is it Europe's, is it the world's or is it out of this world? And above all, who is a member?

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300 *KE*, p. 141.
301 Goldie, p. 57.

These are all questions pertinent to Eliot's critique of Arnold, which can find only an incomplete articulation.

Piers Gray sees a philosophical edge to Eliot's arrival at this historical crossroads[302]; his 'historical sense', Gray observes, amounts to an engagement with Bradleyan historical critique. In 'The Presuppositions of Critical History' Bradley points out what he thinks are some common misconceptions about history: namely that it cannot be subjected to scientific scrutiny and that history is not simply there, directly available to our senses. Firstly, because history is in the past; secondly, because, even that which is present to the senses, cannot be said to be cognitively immediate. The distortion of past events by history becomes apparent through the critical function; that, as Bradley puts it, there is no absolute way of telling history from the historian:

> We do not question that history apart from the historian does exist; and contrariwise we must take it for granted that there is no such thing as history which is merely 'subjective', or, in other words, that whatever is 'created' by the historian is not in a proper sense history at all.[303]

One must note that Bradley is not giving way to the temptation of doing away with history all together, but instead is trying to define in which shape this history is ever not subjective. Eliot's 'historical sense' is an attempt to articulate this possibility, for which he paradoxically borrows the very scientific method Bradley repudiates in the form of the absolute historical poetics of Tradition. Bradley goes on to add that the historian's mission "is not and cannot be merely receptive, or barely reproductive"[304], that his activity must inevitably involve the creation of a canon. The crux of the question is for Bradley the extent to which historical activity is not merely a personal projection, while admitting that "a history without so-called prejudications is a mere delusion."[305] In the end Bradley does not seem able to rescue history in any form, at which point he turns to the cognitive status of facts. He notes that a historical fact may not be unveiled by appealing to "the nature of that which may be regarded as the minimum of fact in

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302 Piers Gray, *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909-1922* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982). See also Lewis Freed, 'The Dissociation of Sensibility' in *T. S. Eliot: The Critic as Philosopher* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1979), pp. 131-149.

303 F. H. Bradley, 'The Presuppositions of Critical History' (1874) in *Collected Essays*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), I, p. 8.

304 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 10.

305 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 11.

general."[306] This is precisely what Eliot attempts with his theory of impersonality. The crucial point of Bradley's philosophical approach is that he is not concerned with the essence of the object world but with the essence of the perceiving subject; that is, his fascination lies in how the individual creates an impression of objectivity despite the critical certainty that the world is indeed a prejudication and that historical facts

> are recorded events, and that means that, though fleeing in themselves, they are yet made stable; though divisible in time, they are regarded as wholes; and though the offspring of the mind, they are still independent and real.[307]

Bradley's only answer is that perception is ultimately based in faith, which makes the objectivity of facts stable against the philosophical evidence to the contrary. However true, this is an unsatisfactory conclusion which Eliot is addressing in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

For Bradley faith in facts attenuates the isolation of the finite centre, which amounts to the collective agreement on a common world of objects. Faith artificially compensates for the ultimate isolation of the ego. Yet, there is a limit to this coherence:

> The experience of others has no meaning for us except so far as it becomes our own; the existence of others is no existence for us if it is not in our world that they live.[308]

Others, like historical testimonies, are subject to historical prejudication. This is the price to be paid for critical coherence. Coherence is dependent on spheres of influence; coherence with others depends on their living in *our* world. This conclusion has important temporal implications, because it implies that the inevitable presupposition of the past is the present of the perceiving subject. Our world is not only our cognitive present but also its cultural presuppositions. That is, temporal distances imply a cultural gap only bridged over by the creation of canons. In short, one may not hope to understand another's culture or time if he does not live in one's sphere of influence. The startling conclusion is that finite centres can only cohere with themselves, or others like themselves. But in so far as that is the case, they are no longer finite centres, but cultural subjects.

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306 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 13.
307 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 13.
308 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 19.

This conclusion does away with the ideal presupposition of the finite centre, yet it does so as a means of avoiding its implied radical solipsism. We are no longer isolated egos alone; we are accompanied by the few with whom we manage to cohere. But, at what price? Is there such a thing, in a world of culturally organized subjects, as *another*? Perhaps this is expecting too much of Bradley, yet it is a latent danger Eliot himself identified in Bradley's *Ethical Studies*. His review of the second edition of the book originally published in 1876 ('Bradley's *Ethical Studies'*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1352 (December 29, 1927) [981]-982, also included in *For Lancelot Andrews*) notes:

> There is one direction in which these words – and, indeed, Bradley's philosophy as a whole – might be pushed, which would be dangerous; the direction of diminishing the value and dignity of the individual, of sacrificing him to a Church or a State.[309]

Eliot is referring to a passage from 'Concluding Remarks' in *Ethical Studies* – which he quotes[310] - where Bradley appears to encourage the renunciation of the individual will for the sake of a Divine Will. Closer inspection reveals a different conclusion. Ultimately, the underlying scepticism of Bradley's philosophy does not allow for a reassuring sense of cultural participation or terrifying imperative towards social subjugation for the isolated ego. There is no contradiction because, as Eliot tells us, "scepticism and disillusion are a useful equipment for religious understanding."[311] Eliot in fact warns us that Bradley's position must be distinguished from Arnold's idea of culture as a moral guiding-principle. If we return to 'The Presuppositions of Critical History' we find that

> any narrative of 'facts' which involves judgements proceeding from religious consciousness or a view of the world which, as a whole or in respect of the part in question differs from ours, cannot have such a force as to assure us of any event un-analogous to present experience.[312]

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309 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *FLA*, pp. 80-81. It must be noted that Eliot did not list – and may be had not read till this date – *Ethical Studies* for his doctoral thesis *Knowledge and Experience*. He is working Bradley's bibliography, as it were, chronologically backwards.

310 '"How can the human-divine ideal ever be my will? The answer is, Your will it never can be as the will of your private self, so that your private self should become wholly good. To that self you must die, and by faith be made one with that ideal. You must resolve to give up your will, as the mere will of this or that man, and you must put your whole self, your entire will, into the will of the divine. That must be your one self, as it is your true self; that you must hold to both with thuoght and will, and all other you must renounce"', 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *FLA*, pp. 80. [note: the reader should bear in mind that two different editions of 'Francis Herbert Bradley' are being used, one from *FLA* and another from *SP*].

311 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *SP*, p. 200.

312 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 31.

Bradley takes comfort for his concessions to cultural identity with the thought that given the option the individual would tend to believe his eyes before he believes somebody or something not immediately available – that is, *events un-analogous to present experience.* The individual is to this limited extent free to make up his mind and control his own critical judgement. Just as we are aware that history is implicitly a critical construction, we develop a skepticism that underpins any received historical or collective statement of fact. Bradley does not rule out the importance of religious consciousness as that subjugation to something other than ourselves, but he refuses to reduce it to a purely cultural phenomenon as does Arnold. Bradley does not allow for a simple synthesis out of the dialectic. As Eliot notes in 'Francis Herbert Bradley': "Bradley is careful, in indicating the process, not to exaggerate either will or intellect at the expense of the other."[313]

Bradley concludes that judgement can only function as a skeptical reaction to given truths, that "criticism from its very essence cannot be simply affirmative."[314] This critical negativity is crucial in Bradley. Negativity is his main tool of reconciliation between the acknowledgement that history is *made* and the affirmation that for the individual the world is real in the shape he sees it with his own eyes. So that

> It would indeed be strange if every record were authentic and trustworthy [. . .] Not one at the present time would dare say that such is the case; and such is not the case, then criticism, if it is to be criticism, must necessarily be to a certain extent negative.[315]

The awareness of error demands the constant re-adjustment with the views of others. It is through the negative dimension of our beliefs that we approach anything resembling absolute judgement: "a negative criterion, if it exists at all, must be from its nature an absolute criterion, or be a self-contradiction"[316]. But Bradley's concept of coherence is not reassuring enough for Eliot to avoid a preoccupied chapter in his thesis on the impending solipsism of Bradley's

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313 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *SP*, p. 202. Pamela McCallum's comments on this debate are very enlightening: "Thus Arnold's own 'culture' [. . .] had left him inadequately prepared to recognise the profound philosophical distinction Bradley draws between morality and religion [. . .] In much the same way, Eliot insists that the limitations Bradley placed on an imperfectly realizable morality ought to have been embodied in the concept of an ethical culture. Instead, Arnold had hypostatised culture as an ideal which is at once real, qualities that can be ascribed only to religion", McCallum, p. 114.

314 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 47.

315 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 47.

316 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 47.

philosophy. Yet it is precisely this threat that may have encouraged Eliot to culturally thematize his critical concerns in search of a cognitive faith which is not simply an absolute scepticism – as a kind of mystical consciousness – but which can be accounted for positively in the world. For in "*Appearance and Reality* [Bradley] assumes that our common everyday knowledge is on the whole true so far as it goes, but that we do not know how far it does go."[317]

In a paper Eliot wrote for Josiah Royce's seminar in Logic between 1913-14 entitled 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual', he turns an anthropological issue into a debate on the possibility of critical discourse. This paper is the most widely treated by Eliot scholars. Manju Jain and Piers Gray both point out Eliot's insistence in this paper that the interpretation of the past cannot claim to unveil historical facts. Eliot had in mind approaches that claimed in this respect scientific exactitude, particularly Behaviourism. He was suspicious, at this early stage, of approaches that refuse to take account of the religious, *felt* experience of the subject and concentrate, instead, on the public ritualised exercise of religion. Over a decade after he wrote 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual', Eliot still maintains his criticism of what he then identified as Psychologism: the inability to admit of the interiority of felt experience in the account of human values. In 'John Bramhall' ('Archbishop Bramhall', *Theology*, 15, no 85 (July 1927), 11-17, also included in *For Lancelot Andrews*), Eliot spends much time discrediting Hobbes's political philosophy for over-stressing the psychological aspect of the citizen's public behaviour at the expense of inherent value in the form of personal belief[318]. According to Eliot, Hobbes confuses psychology with ethics. Furthermore, Eliot observes,

> The attitude of Hobbes toward moral philosophy has by no means disappeared from human thought; nor has the confusion between moral philosophy and mechanistic psychology.[319]

Behaviourism, which Eliot identifies with the sociology of Durkheim in 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual', stresses externality as a way of making the primitive experience available as scientific facts to one's present. Behaviourism fails, in the terms of Eliot's early historicism, to

317 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *SP*, p. 203.

318 In 'Francis Herbert Bradley' also included in *For Lancelot Andrews* he notes: "The lack of [wisdom] produces those unbalanced philosophies, such as Behaviourism, of which we hear a great deal", 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *FLA*, p. 67.

319 'John Bramhall', *FLA*, pp. 37-38. Crucially Eliot adds Bertrand Russell and I. A. Richards to the list of guilty parties.

admit the pastness of the past as part of the personal experience of the individual at the time it took place; that,

> in many cases no interpretation of a rite could explain its origin. The meaning of the series of acts is to the performers themselves an interpretation; the same ritual remaining practically unchanged may assume different meanings for different generations of performers; and the rite may have originated before 'meaning' meant anything at all.[320]

The pastness of the past must involve personal experience, and as such it must remain unknowable as a scientific fact. This inaccessibility is aggravated by the impossibility of determining the self-awareness of the participant in primitive rituals; that there might not have been a 'meaning' in the first place. This is the skeptical conclusion at which Manju Jain arrives. In contradistinction, Gray argues that although Eliot's scepticism in his paper is that of 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', it is subtly alleviated by the influence of Josiah Royce's idealist optimism which presupposes an ideal community of interpretants as opposed to a solipsistic – and Bradleyan – finite centre.

This apparent contradiction between finite centres and the community is at the heart of Eliot's struggle with Bradleyan philosophy. What seems to perplex Eliot is that the finite centre in its isolation may still be said to participate in a community and have a common goal. For Eliot, the articulation of this simultaneity holds the key out of solipsism, just as it seems to confirm it. So that as soon as he makes concessions to knowledge as communal, that "in adjusting our behaviour to that of others and in co-operating with them we come to intend an identical world"[321], Eliot cannot help problematizing that very identity. Identity, he argues, involves a concept of ideality which cannot claim to apprehend a real world there for communal taking. In this Eliot stops short of the idealist pragmatism of Josiah Royce in his doctoral thesis.[322] But if Eliot refuses the ideal interpretative community, what alternative is

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320 Eliot's 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual' quoted in Manju Jain, *T. S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 145.

321 *KE*, p. 143.

322 Richard Shusterman is more interested in seeing Eliot's development as an unchecked progress towards the ideal pragmatism of his postgraduate tutor Josiah Royce. See Shusterman comparison of Eliot's 'tradition' with Royce's 'community of interpretants' in chapter 7, part III, of *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism* (London: Duckworth, 1988), pp. 165-191.

there to ensure the coherence of finite centres other than Bradley's negative logic, which is increasingly identified with one akin to religious consciousness and mystical experience?

In 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual', Eliot is rehearsing the problem he will develop in his thesis regarding the nature of our memory of past events: the impossibility of considering a past event in personal experience as an actuality which can be re-captured in its original form. As Bradley puts it in 'The Presuppositions of Critical History':

> The 'original fact' is primarily for history a fallacious inference, and if by the 'original fact' be meant again what that fact should have been, still for history this is an inference, the theory of a theory, whose result is a double-distilled theory.[323]

This is a statement which Eliot reformulates in his doctoral thesis in the following way:

> We must remember that no view is original or ultimate: when we inquire into the real world, however, we mean the world from the view point of finite centres as subjects only; we mean the real world for us now, not from the point of view of some further developed mind tracing its ancestors and the world they lived in.[324]

We do not understand our actions thinking of what the future would think of ourselves. As perceiving subjects, we are trapped in our present as much as events in the past are trapped in their own ultimately inaccessible experience of themselves: "my mind", Eliot admits, "is a point of view from which I cannot possibly escape (to which indeed I am bound so closely that the word escape is without meaning)."[325] The problem of perception is ultimately a historical problem as Eliot makes clear in 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual'. But it is also a problem of discourse.

The problem of finite centres leads Eliot into a theoretical impasse and a disillusionment with the discourse of philosophy: "We may easily be overawed by language, and attribute to it more philosophic prestige than it really deserves."[326] The paradox between individual and communal perception in the context of the interpretation of the past (as somebody else's experience) fails to achieve a coherent philosophical articulation. It fails

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323 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 49.
324 *KE*, p. 145.
325 *KE*, p. 145.
326 *KE*, p. 159.

because it requires the impossible task of holding two points of view simultaneously; essentially that the world is both objective and subjective:

> The self, we find, seems to depend upon a world which in turn depends upon it; and nowhere, I repeat, can we find anything original or ultimate [. . .] From one point of view we know that the object exists; but from another point of view this is mere hypothesis.[327]

One point of view is practical, the other theoretical. Eliot's philosophical conclusions are ultimately based on the manipulation of philosophy's discourse rather than on its ideas themselves. Gray points out that Eliot's gradual reconciliation with J. G. Frazer's genealogy of primitive religions, for instance, lies in the latter's discourse alone; his emphasis on *presentation* rather than *interpretation* of anthropological facts. This parallels Eliot's insistence on a scientific model of style in 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama'[328] (*Dial*, 69, no 5 (Nov. 1920), [441]-447, also in *The Sacred Wood*). Elsewhere, Eliot had, in the philosophical paper entitled 'Description and Interpretation', contrasted the metaphysics of interpretation with the scientific model of description in which he states that the latter must always fall under the influence of the former. Gray refers to Eliot's introduction to his mother's *Savonarola* in 1926, where he insisted that "Frazer has withdrawn in more and more cautious abstention from the attempt to explain"; here explanation is a by-word for interpretation. Yet Gray is not unaware of the apparent contradiction between Eliot's philosophical position in 'Description and Interpretation' and this latter statement. How can Eliot show a preference for description over explanation, given his early insistence on the lack of an absolute distinction between the two?[329] For Gray the answer is simple, it is a deliberate choice to liberate himself from Bradley's philosophy whose inevitable solipsism must only find partial solution in a negative dialectic. Eliot must move from the negative to the positive method even at the expense of philosophical thoroughness.[330] Gray is perhaps right, which might explain the *forced* scientific

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[327] *KE*, p. 146 & 159.

[328] "Permanent literature is always a presentation: either a presentation of thought, or a presentation of feeling by a statement of events in human action or objects in the external world", 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', *SW*, p. 64-65.

[329] Eliot admitted in Royce's seminar that "description is just as bad as explanation", *Josiah Royce's Seminar, 1913-1914: As Recorded in the Notebooks of Harry T. Costello*, Grover Smith ed. (New Brunswick & New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. 119.

[330] "It may seem paradoxical, but it is because of Bradley's unrelenting questioning of all assumptions, his unremitting scepticism about all presuppositions of meaning and purpose that Eliot is in the end forced to accept

style of *The Sacred Wood* that never quite achieves complete conviction. Eliot's commitment to science is never very far from metaphysics and belief. As he stated in 'Description and Interpretation', the exercise of description can only be made from a position which is not merely analytical, but must itself appeal to a metaphysical conviction of its own. This conviction must in the end become an interpretation. Eliot's commitment to scientific analysis in his early literary criticism can be seen as a way of escape out of this metaphysical circularity.[331]

However much Eliot tries to convince himself about the analytic method, he cannot quite stop hearing the echoes of his postgraduate philosophical papers. Costello recalls a session at Royce's seminar where Eliot delivered his paper 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual'. It was the 16th of December 1913:

> The great question is as to what is the status of a supposed fact which includes as part of itself a belief or a meaning? How can we be sure we are correctly interpreting the mental life of the savage when the savage could not verify our interpretation if we could present it to him, because he could not understand it?[332]

This objection to the scientific method also ends up undermining Eliot's 'objective correlative' because as he put it some six years later in 'Hamlet and his Problems': "we should have to understand things which Shakespeare did not understand himself."[333] Eliot is here still pulling and tugging over the behaviourist fallacy. This fallacy undermines a fundamental scientific presumption: that there are facts open to analysis. Eliot's commitment to the scientific approach in his early criticism is a desperate effort to overcome this solipsistic objection.

But Eliot does more than that, he attempts to overcome the problem of scientific analysis by participating in the prevailing scientific climate of his time, by becoming, as it were, part of the problem. Brian Lee makes an interesting point about Eliot attempt to both participate and delimit his involvement in society by playing science and religion against each

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the limited conclusion's of Frazer's formal method and declare them to be a 'positive method'", Piers Gray, *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909-1922* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 134.

331 This strange contiguity of the sceptical Eliot and Eliot the Royalist, Classicist and Anglo-Catholic is vindicated by Jeffrey Perl. He insists that Eliot's preference for analysis "documents the easy passage from Eliot's earlier to his later viewpoint and show how the one could be said to fulfil the implication of the other", *Skepticism and Modern Emnity: Before and After Eliot* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 89.

332 'Summary of discussion: December 16, 1913', Smith, *Josiah Royce's Seminar*, p. 85.

333 'Hamlet and His Problems', *SW*, p. 103.

other. He notes that Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' "takes its terms from modern science [. . .] rather than religion. However, it is hard to imagine that any 'absolute' of 'unmediated vision could be fundamentally at one with the final purposes of modern scientific method."[334] Eliot's irony springs from this conflation; not to be confused with a fantastic sense of humour or wilful contradiction. Lee adds that Eliot was "at once fighting against and reflecting the tendencies of his time [. . .] leading to the assumption of masking roles, or momentary ventriloquism" as a form of self-preservation that goes with the "failure of confidence or nerve even at moments of essential self assertion against the materialist-positivist trends of his time."[335] The limit of Eliot's faith lies in the scepticism about discourse he inherits from Bradley. My claim here is that by rejecting metaphysics, Eliot is ultimately engaging in the metaphysical act of sharing a collective faith, even if that faith is in science. It is not surprising that Eliot's favouring of Frazer's scientific approach in the introduction to *Savonarola* coincides with his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1926. Eliot embraces his primitive consciousness – both explanatory and metaphysical – just as his scientific consciousness achieves its apotheosis; at the point where scientific scepticism meets belief. This entails reversing, as it were, the evolutionary process from explanation to description which he noted in Royce's seminar in 1913:

> The primitive mind has a native craving for explanation, luxuriates in the feeling of explanation. Casual explanations tend to go over to the form of relation of universal to particular, and, as the tendency to transcend the given continues to diminish, finally explanation is transformed into description.[336]

The difficulty for Eliot, unlike the consciousness of the savage, is that his commitment to his own present experience is undermined by critical self-consciousness and its consequent skepticism about personal experience as faith which makes a straightforward return to primitivism impossible. Edward Lobb would like to argue that this primitivism hides a yearning for the naivety, in a Romantic sense, which adopts the mythology of a lost Golden Age.[337] This is to oversimplify the philosophical struggle Eliot is undertaking. He is far too conscious of the

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[334] Brian Lee, *Theory and Personality: The Significance of T. S. Eliot's Criticism* (London: The Athlone Press, 1979), p. 106.

[335] Lee, p. 108.

[336] 'Summary of discussion: December 16, 1913', Smith, *Josiah Royce's Seminar*, p. 121.

[337] See Lobb, pp. 45-47.

theoretical pitfalls involved in thus articulating the problem. These themes continue in the doctoral thesis:

> A science is such because it is able to deal with objects which are all of one type; and the aim of science is to deduce reality [. . .] to one type of object, and the ultimate type of object I should suppose [. . .] to be points in a mathematical relation. But physical theories [. . .] are apt to end in mystery, inasmuch as the final object is often not an object at all [. . .] At this point a theory would become metaphysical, passing from one object to another; and two types can only be held together by an act of faith.[338]

The anthropological and historical problem of the interpretation of primitive ritual is an extension of a cognitive problem; that of the perception of objects which – like the past and other people's minds – are not immediately experienced. Thus Eliot's resolution to the problem of the finite centre's solipsism is partly a turn towards the coherence of communities thorough outward behaviour, but also a simultaneous emphasis of the importance of personal experience – as faith – that holds finite centres together even as they engage in that collective behaviour. It confirms the inescapability of the metaphysics of primitive explanation as faith. This primitivism needs not be recuperated or historically postulated, it is already here. Eliot exploits the metaphysical potential of his analytic training as means to condition the scientific paradigms which help him out of Bradley's metaphysical impasse, to arrive finally at faith, so that, as he was to note in 'Francis Herbert Bradley' (1927): "scepticism and disillusion are a useful equipment for religious understanding."[339] Eliot paradoxically combats scepticism with faith in his early criticism, via the descriptive powers of science Eliot encourages himself to *believe* in. Science is, in the process, re-worked through his criticism and increasingly thematized with history and culture which speak for the latent metaphysics which science cannot ultimately acknowledge. This is an important shift which has radical consequences for Eliot scholarship, as it may appear to legitimise the appearance of prejudice in Eliot's critical discourse. One should note, instead, that Eliot's adoption of cultural themes encourage a political dimension in his critical rhetoric. If Eliot has to admit increasingly that, whether scientific or not, every critical position must acknowledge a point of view, then, he must make this point of view explicit; state, to himself and others, where he stands rather than hide behind an unsustainable scientific skepticism – itself an ideological position in the end. As he admits in

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338 *KE*, p. 162.

339 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *FLA*, p. 76.

the introduction to *The Wheel of Fire* (1930): "In my previous skepticism I am quite ready to admit the presence of elements of pure prejudice."[340]

Pragmatism and Faith

Eliot's central problem is his skeptical awareness that though thought-systems are contingent, they are also inescapable. It is what Christopher Ricks calls Eliot's *justified* skepticism.[341] However, I must insist that this justified skepticism, if pragmatic,[342] is insufficient for Eliot. In other words, the *via media* – and perhaps it is here that Eliot begins to leave his early fascination with Aristotle – seems a logical impossibility because one cannot hold two points of view at the same time. Eliot is clear on this point as he put it in 'Francis Herbert Bradley':

> The lack of [common sense] produces those unbalanced philosophies, such as Behaviourism, of which we hear a great deal. A purely 'scientific' philosophy ends by denying what we know to be true; and, on the other hand, the great weakness of Pragmatism is that it ends by being of no use to anybody.[343]

It ends up being of no use to anybody because it is too inclusive to be meaningful to anyone in particular, and which, in turn, shows up 'scientific' philosophy. Shusterman overplays the influence of pragmatism over Eliot and sometimes seems to ignore Eliot's struggle with his teachers when at Harvard – and particularly Josiah Royce, himself not a thorough pragmatist[344], in the seminar debates of 1913-14. To say, as Shusterman does, that

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[340] T. S. Eliot's Introduction to Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (1930) (London: Methuen, 1962), p. xiii.

[341] Christopher Ricks, *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. 81.

[342] I say this despite Richard Shusterman's conviction that Eliot is, fundamentally, a pragmatist: "Whatever the extent to which Eliot formally imbibed pragmatism, it was certainly a philosophy well-suited to his intellectual temperament – his characteristic blend of skepticism and belief, and his tough-minded, practical, yet deeply devoted attitude toward art, criticism, and even religion", (Richard Shusterman, *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism* (London: Duckworth, 1988), p. 193. Shusterman has good reason to say this: he is himself a pragmatist. In a sense it is easy to see Eliot as a pragmatist, but to leave it at that is to miss a crucial dimension of his intellectual struggle. The problem with pragmatism is that it undermines any possibility of faith. However much one may be convinced that to believe is a natural and profitable project, how can one have faith in a system which one knows is culturally random? This is indeed a defeatist kind of conviction which is condemned to remain aloof from the *experience* of one's system of belief.

[343] 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *FLA*, p. 84.

[344] Eliot's immediate influence at Harvard is Josiah Royce, who is not thoroughly a pragmatist, being more concerned with the idealist implications of pragmatism. This is something Piers Gray seems to suggest in *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development*. An idealism which is in the end counter-pragmatic if it encourages us to engage with faith as a felt experience. If one acts upon faith one is not being pragmatic – not consciously anyway. And if one is conscious, then everything is pragmatic which is to say "that it ends by being of no *use* to anybody", 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *SP*, p. 204. Note how Eliot's use of italics parodies Pragmatism's emphasis on the term 'use' as practice, which begs the question of the irony inherent in the title of Eliot's *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* in 1933.

> one reason for many of these shifts and one of the most constant and formative factors through his changing critical and theoretical pronouncements is the pragmatic impulse,[345]

is to say not very much at all.

It is true that Eliot's last paragraph of his thesis appears to open the door to Pragmatism:

> If I have insisted on the practical (pragmatic?) in the constitution and meaning of objects, it is because the practical is a practical metaphysic. And this emphasis upon practice – upon the relativity and instrumentality of knowledge – is what impels us toward the absolute.[346]

But if practice is all we can safely count on, Eliot admits, it is not merely as a mechanical or Behaviourist enterprise, but one legitimised by something outside itself. It is, at least, a practical metaphysic. This is, however, still within the paradigms of pragmatism, which admits of the practical necessity to do precisely that. Yet it would be a mistake, in the light of the development of Eliot's criticism, to call him a pragmatist. Eliot is dissatisfied with the thought that there is only a practical need to believe, which in a sense is not believing at all, because the contents of our beliefs are not given the practical validity necessary to *really* believe. They are believed, rather, in a way that they are practical; a metaphysical practice rather than a practical metaphysics. This ambiguity is exploited at the end of 'The Epistemologist Theory of Knowledge (continued)' of Eliot's doctoral thesis in the following way:

> Practice, and this is the difficulty [. . .] is shot through with theory, and theory with practice [. . .] In general we may say, nevertheless, that the sharper and more complete the lines, the more theoretical the account; and in this way, when we attempt to define practice we get a theory, and a theory may incorporate itself into a practice. Hence our theory will be found full of practical motives and practical consequences, and our practice will be found to be largely based upon speculation.[347]

Pragmatism is nothing more than a theory of a practice too general to be of any practical use to anyone.

Metaphysics is, for Eliot in the mid-1920s, not just an figurative term for system building, but one deeply involved in a particular and literal version of the world of experience as expressed by dogma. Whereas scientific exactitude suffers the opposite fate, it becomes just a mirage of accurate description too universal to mean anything in particular. This is, for the

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345 Richard Shusterman, *Philosophy of Criticism*, p. 193.
346 *KE*, p. 169.
347 *KE*, pp. 137-138.

converted Eliot, the false worship of science. As a defence of Lancelot Andrewes's prose style Eliot wrote in 1928:

> To persons whose minds are habituated to feed on the vague jargon of our time, when we have a vocabulary for everything and exact ideas about nothing – when a word half understood, torn from its place in some alien or half-formed science, as of psychology, conceals from both writer and reader the utter meaninglessness of a statement, when all dogma is in doubt except the dogmas of sciences of which we have read in the newspapers, when the language of theology itself, under the influence of an undisciplined mysticism of popular philosophy, tends to become a language of tergiversation – Andrewes may seem pedantic and verbal.[348]

This condemnation of science is already latent in the early criticism of *The Sacred Wood*, even as he seemed, at the time, to endorse it. As we have already noted, in one of his reviews from the *Athenaeum* there included, 'The Perfect Critic', Eliot was not simply encouraging scientific criticism, but re-defining science and showing suspicion of its exact terminology which may mean "either nothing at all or something still more exact than anything it suggests to us."[349] In a sense the ground is ready from the beginning for the priority reversal between science and metaphysics. Philosophy gradually reappears as an inevitably thematized – both prejudiced and metaphysical – language; thematized, namely, by religion and, consequentially, by politics and culture. This thematization is the inevitable extension of the process of cognition which never has its objects directly before consciousness like ideal mathematical equations. This extension involves the inclusion of the cultural and metaphysical conditions of belief, not just the purely cognitive perception of objects. This line of thought takes Eliot to reverse his allegiance with Russell, if there ever had been one. In 'A Commentary' for *The Criterion* in 1924 we find the following statement:

> One is immediately struck by the arrogance of the scientist. No literary man would pretend to sweep aside the whole of science of any century with the magnificence with which Mr Russell dismisses nineteenth-century literature and art. And the truth seems to us to be the reverse of Mr. Russell's implication. The man of letters or the man of 'culture' of the present time is far too easily impressed and overawed by scientific knowledge and ability; the aristocracy of culture has abdicated before the demagogy of science.[350]

Eliot may be retrospectively referring to himself as *the man of culture of the present time* who, in his early criticism, was too easily overawed by science. For Eliot, the problem with present culture lies in the popular faith in science, rather than in the arts. Although this statement re-

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348 'Lancelot Andrewes', *FLA*, p. 24.

349 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, pp. 8-9.

350 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, 2, no 7 (April 1924), p. 233.

affirms Eliot's self-conscious cultural immersion in the very same science worshipping culture, it also qualifies his participation in it. There is, however, a touch of Arnoldean aloofness in Eliot's words; he reserves the responsibility of cultural productions to a literary elite, of which, we must assume, Eliot considers himself one as well.

Just as Eliot moves away from the absolute science of a cognitive criticism of art objects, he sometimes appears to overcompensate by proposing an absolute cultural hierarchy. As he puts it in the preface to *For Lancelot Andrews* (1928):

> The general point of view may be described as classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion.[351]

Once Eliot makes explicit his 'prejudices', he is in dangerous territory. Just like Bradley is when he admits that the only way to cohere with others is communally, but only with people like us.[352] But Eliot has learnt his lesson from him. He is careful to condition the statement by admitting the presence of prejudice. This involves an attenuated negativity some readers have perceived as the rhetorical trademark of his criticism: the pride of excessive humbleness. But may be this rhetorical resourcefulness is not his but originates in Bradley:

> And many readers, having in mind Bradley's polemical irony and his obvious zest in using it, his habit of discomfiting an opponent with a sudden profession of ignorance, of inability to understand, or of incapacity for abstruse thought, have concluded that this is all a mere pose – and even a somewhat unscrupulous one. But deeper study of Bradley's mind convinces us that the modesty is real, and his irony the weapon of a modest and highly sensitive man.[353]

The question is whether this is a conscious methodology or simply philosophical insecurity; such ideological humility may lack the appropriate conviction to carry it through. Does not it simply leave him open to the accusation of a latent pragmatism? One is left wondering whether Eliot's act of faith ever finds closure, shedding its pyretic self-consciousness. Yet this self-consciousness is necessary if one is not to fall into pure prejudice, a conclusion which seems to place conviction and affirmation beyond discourse, and gets us into a philosophical vicious circle once again. Thus, can Eliot completely reconcile the metaphysics of personal experience

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351 'Preface', *FLA*, p. ix.

352 Bradley, 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', *Collected Essays*, I, p. 19.

353 'Francis Herbert Bradley', *SP*, p 196.

with the time-bound cultural and dogmatic expression which dictate it? In a sense he does not, as he notes in 'Lancelot Andrews':

> To the ordinary cultivated student of civilization the genesis of a Church is of little interest, and at all events we must not confound the history of a Church with its spiritual meaning.[354]

The cultural expression of Church history appears to take second place to its metaphysical meaning. Yet he is quick to qualify this dualism, and adds:

> To the ordinary observer the English Church in history means Hooker and Jerémy Taylor - and should mean Andrewes also: it means George Herbert, and it means the churches of Christopher Wren. This is not an error: a Church must be judged by its intellectual fruits, [. . .] and it must be made real to the eye by monuments of artistic merit.[355]

The cultivated student and the ordinary observer place their emphasis differently - either on dogma or practice -, yet Eliot offers a reconciliation of the real and the ideal based on the cognitive encounter, where the cultural expression is made real to the eye. This is indeed no error, yet there is the whiff of pragmatism about it because of the critical point of view Eliot must take to make that very statement. And that is always the catch: that the very intellectual effort Eliot makes to reinstate belief in practice undermines that very leap of faith because he cannot but encourage it theoretically. This is important because it points to the real struggle in Eliot. This is not so much the favouring of one doctrine over another, but the possibility of its articulation without exacting the exclusivity which any doctrine must, if believed, carry with it. It must be really believed, for otherwise it is no doctrine, but pragmatic belief – where *really* believing means faith. Thus in the early twenties, Eliot's letting cultural themes permeate his discourse is tentative. Just as he can see no rhetorical truth that does not claim a culturally dogmatic justification, he is still haunted by the inevitable exclusivity it entails. The result is a constant balancing act in which Eliot's radical statements of doctrinal and political allegiance are counterbalanced by the admission of their relative dependence on cultural variations, taste or prejudice. The absoluteness of metaphysics is continually checked by its political nature, yet this is something it cannot shed without risking the pragmatist alternative of making the political a tenuous allegiance to humanity as a whole. Eliot must once again turn to cognition to find a discriminating element to gauge the appropriate relation between the metaphysics and the

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[354] 'Lancelot Andrewes', *FLA*, p. 15.

[355] 'Lancelot Andrewes', *FLA*, pp. 15-16.

politics. He does this by identifying the political wing of pragmatism with *humanism*, and the discriminating cognitive disposition with *emotionalism*.

Metaphysical Politics

One may compare the following statement from 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics' read before Harvard's Philosophical Club the 24th of October, 1913:

> But when we have dissociated [Lippman's] Bergsonian metaphysic from his political enthusiasm, I think that we will find that the relation between the politics and the philosophy is only emotional, and at least in some sense illegitimate,[356]

with Eliot's later essay 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt' (1928):

> But it is not clear that Mr Babbitt has any other enthusiasm to offer except the enthusiasm for being lifted out of one's merely rational self by some enthusiasm.[357]

In other words, Eliot criticises in Babbitt the promotion of an enthusiasm for rationality which is itself irrational. He is not preoccupied as much by this irrationality, however, as by Babbitt's failure to acknowledge it. This irrationality is fundamentally an aspect of personal faith; in Bradley's terms, the instinct for finding a bad reason for what we believe upon instinct, conditioned by the acknowledgement that the finding of a reason is no less an instinct. The dualism between the bad reasons of politics and metaphysical instinct is never quite overcome by Eliot. And just like Lippman, Babbitt's humanism makes dogma irrational, because "he is unable to take the religious view – that is to say he cannot accept any dogma or revelation."[358] The result of this rejection is not a release from the irrationality of dogma, instead – Eliot notes in 'The Relationship Between Philosophy and Metaphysics' – Lippman has "fallen into the most dangerous of all dogmas – the dogma that we must do without dogma"[359]; that is, it offers a worse kind of irrationality. Lippman's alliance with Bergson is abhorred by Eliot because they encourage in each other the absence of human experience other than personal emotions. It takes for granted the experience of the outside and its necessary collective organization. It takes it for granted because, for Eliot, these theories rely on the existence of the

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356 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', p. 4.
357 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt', *FLA*, p. 137.
358 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt', *FLA*, p. 128.
359 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', p. 11.

very belief systems they are trying to do away with and without which they would not even reach formulation:

> There is no humanistic habit: humanism is, I think, merely the state of mind of a few persons in a few places at a few times. To exist at all, it is dependent upon some other attitude, for it is essentially critical – I would even say parasitical.[360]

This contradiction is exploited further by Eliot in 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt'. He reveals that Humanism and Pragmatism encourage an inner moral check as a substitute for external dogma. If dogma is external to the individual, they conclude, so are the reasons for holding it. Both the public persona and the external reasons are ruled out by the absolute belief in inner reason. Yet Eliot cannot dissociate *inner* reason from the *bad* reasons for existing according to an outside canon, anything else makes the very idea of society impossible:

> The sum of a population of individuals, all ideally and efficiently checking themselves, will never make a whole. And if you distinguish so sharply between 'outer' and 'inner' checks as Mr Babbitt does, then there is nothing left for the individual to check himself by but his own private notions and his judgement which is pretty precarious.[361]

Eliot is here alluding to his pre-conversion debate with John Middleton Murry about the deficiencies of the 'inner voice' in 'The Function of Criticism' (1923):

> For those who obey the inner voice (perhaps 'obey' is not the word) nothing that I can say about criticism will have the slightest value. For they will not be interested in the attempt to find any common principles for the pursuit of criticism. Why have principles, when one has the inner voice? If I like a thing, that is all I want [. . .] And we can not only like whatever we like to like but we can like it for any reason we chose. We are not, in fact, concerned with literary *perfection* at all – the search for perfection is a sign of pettiness, for it shows that the writer has admitted the existence of an unquestioned spiritual authority outside himself, to which he has attempted to *conform*. We are not in fact interested in art. We will not worship Baal. 'The principle of classical leadership is that obeisance is made to the office or to the tradition, never to the man.' And we want, not principles, but men. Thus speaks the Inner Voice.[362]

Babbitt's 'inner check' is Murry's 'Inner Voice'. The premise of Eliot's criticism can be found in Eliot's paper 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics' and its misgivings about pragmatism: "For pragmatism man is the measure of all things. The latter is a 'practical' philosophy. You choose a point of view because you like it."[363] Thus Eliot's criticism is philosophically aimed at Pragmatism, in politics at Whiggery, and in literature at Romanticism.

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360 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt', *FLA*, p. 130.

361 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt', *FLA*, pp. 135-136.

362 'The Function of Criticism' (1923), *SP*, pp. 72-73.

363 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', p. 21.

Overall it is a condemnation of the emotional response as sole guide of judgement. For Eliot, without authority all one is left with is the appetites of the inner voice, which hinges on meaninglessness. The denial of outside principles inevitably undermines discourse and risks solipsism.

In 'The Function of Criticism' Eliot politicises the cognitive literary criticism of *The Sacred Wood* as a result of his confrontation with Middleton Murry's romanticism.[364] Eliot's classicism is the extension of the cognitive validation of judgement in terms, not only of the outside world of objects, but of social structures. Crucially, it initiates Eliot's journey towards his conversion in 1926 and his declaration in *For Lancelot Andrews* (1928) of his Royalism, Classicism and Anglo-Catholicism. It is a dramatic – almost intolerant – statement of belief; but only intolerant, as we have noted, because Eliot finds that *that* is the only way of putting it without relativizing his views and falling into pragmatism. According to Goldie, however, Eliot's dogmatic tone in 'The Function of Criticism' is contextually determined by his debate with Murry:

> Manoeuvred into making what amounted to a manifesto for his new classicism Eliot provided an essay which marked a major shift away from an emphasis on the free disinterested intelligence of an Aristotle or Gourmont delineated in 'The Perfect Critic', towards an espousal of the Hulmean belief that 'men cannot get on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves'.[365]

Yet this should not be seen as a major shift: 'The Function of Criticism' simply continues the rhetorical experiments Eliot had begun in *The Sacred Wood*, amounting to a critical shift, but only insofar as Eliot deliberately commits himself to putting his money where his criticism is, politely speaking. It articulates the cultural expression of Eliot's cognitive premises in *The Sacred Wood*. Eliot is still prioritising the outside world, against which we must measure our judgement and, thus, avoid subjective expressions of taste; only that this outside world is not just one of universal art objects, but of cultural expression as well. It must be noted, then, that Eliot is, in 'The Function of Criticism', still concerned with the impersonal analysis of the work of art:

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[364] For a detailed account of this confrontation see David Goldie, *A Critical Difference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 69-127.
[365] Goldie, p. 103.

> But *fact* cannot corrupt taste; it can at worst gratify one taste – a taste for history, let us say, or antiques or biography – under the illusion that it is assisting another. The real corrupters are those who supply opinion or fancy; and Goethe and Coleridge are not guiltless – for what is Coleridge's *Hamlet*: is it an honest inquiry as far as the data permit, or is it an attempt to present Coleridge in an attractive costume?[366]

So if the external reasons for having a particular taste are illusory – are bad – it is better than deliberately trying to fulfil a narcissistic fantasy and pass it off for objective opinion. This passage echoes almost word for word Eliot's criticism of Coleridge in *The Sacred Wood*'s 'Hamlet'.[367] For Goldie the move of 'The Function of Criticism' is from critical sensibility to critical dogmatism; a shift, in other words, from science to politics. This is because Goldie tends to romanticise the *free disinterested intelligence* of Eliot's scientific project in *The Sacred Wood*. In a sense Eliot's scientific approach in 'The Perfect Critic' is already dogmatic because it seeks out the absolute critical statement through scientific exactitude. Although, one must add, it is a scientific approach whose dogmatism Eliot tries to attenuate by suppressing an unholy alliance between metaphysics and culture just as he was proposing in 'The Relationship Between Metaphysics and Politics'. And what is better to avoid this alliance than simply leaving them out? This suppression, by both condemning the cultural over-dependence and metaphysical postulation of the artist, characterizes Eliot's battle to stay free and disinterested in *The Sacred Wood*, but which in the end amounts to a pragmatic pose of detachment only the more cleverly disguised; a pose which is gradually weighed down and eventually dropped. 'The Function of Criticism' opens the flood-gates of the politics latent in *The Sacred Wood* by admitting that the cognitive priority of the external world of objects is itself a political statement about the importance of external authority. The latent politics within the cognitive criticism of Eliot's criticism of the late 1910s are, perhaps, more apparent in Eliot's review of George Wyndham's *Essays in Romantic Literature* ('A Romantic Patrician, *Athenaeum*, 4644 (May 2, 1919), 265-7, included in *The Sacred Wood* as 'A Romantic Aristocrat'). Here Eliot is only with great pains separating the politics from his criticism of Romanticism:

> There may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters. Not that we need conclude that a man of George Wyndham's antecedents and traditions must inevitably be a Romanticist

[366] 'The Function of Criticism', *SP*, p. 76.

[367] "These minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence for their own artistic realisation. Such a mind had Goethe, who made of Hamlet a Werther; and such had Coleridge, who made of Hamlet a Coleridge [. . .] The kind of criticism Goethe and Coleridge produced, in writing of Hamlet, is the most misleading kind possible,' 'Hamlet and His Problems', *SW*, p. 95.

> writer. But this is the case when such a man plants himself firmly in his awareness of caste, when he says " The gentry must not abdicate." In politics this may an admirable formula. It will not do in literature.[368]

Here we have somebody who sounds like a Tory yet misspends his literature in fantastic flights of the imagination: as a romantic aristocrat Wyndham unhappily mixes his politics with his writing Eliot concludes. Yet a closer look reveals that it is not the complete separation between politics and literature that it is at stake. The politics are not the problem, nor is Romantic literature, but the mismatch between the two. No guilty *parties*? Let's look closer. Though the tone of political aloofness is what wants to prevail in this review, the reader feels the underground tremor of a political voice waiting to explode. It sounds like the voice of the Tory party whip ironically telling an idiosyncratic member to get serious so as not to confuse the politics with his private pursuits, that if he likes to write he is sure it is in the best taste. Eliot ironically puts it the other way round – blames the politics for the bad writing – but the scolding has the same objective of singling out the Romantic writing rather than the Tory politics. This latent political allegiance of literature is spelt out in *For Lancelot Andrews* (1928) when romanticism and classicism become politically loaded literary terms. The process starts earlier, though, in 'The Function of Criticism' (1923).

'The Function of Criticism' makes concessions to dogma without attributing to the politics any as yet automatic metaphysical validation, which it is still resisting. This is the intention behind the conclusion of the essay:

> For the kinds of critical works which we have admitted, there is the possibility of co-operative activity, with the further possibility of arriving at something outside ourselves, which may provisionally be called truth. But if anyone complains that I have not defined truth, or fact, or reality, I can only say apologetically that it was no part of my purpose to do so, but only to find a scheme into which, whatever they are, they will fit, if they exist.[369]

This signalling automatically qualifies Eliot's dogmatism. Eliot is not saying that political *co-operative activity* automatically makes a truth; that would be a relative truth. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of collectively – implying politically – going about the business of metaphysical truth in a way that the isolated ego cannot be expected to, if, that is, there is such a thing as truth. For if it is anywhere metaphysics lies outside; the truth is out there. This final *if they exist* takes Eliot's conviction to the edge, by paradoxically suggesting that there may not

[368] 'Imperfect Critics: A Romantic Aristocrat', *SW*, p. 32.

369 'The Function of Criticism', *SP*, p. 76.

be metaphysical truths but that, if they exist, this would be the way to apprehend them. This doubt attenuates the dogmatism of 'The Function of Criticism' just as it makes his conviction almost impossible. Eliot's struggle at this point is about the ways of articulating this conviction without either sounding fanatical on the one hand or pragmatically undermining the possibility of the conviction – faith – on the other.

Souls and Personality

Eliot's critical shift in "The Function of Criticism' is one of commitment. It is the final assault on the pragmatic safety net of justified scepticism. Admittedly, there is much of the ideal pragmatism of Royce's community of interpretants in Eliot's stress on external authority, yet Eliot goes further, and against pragmatism, he hints at the necessity of absolute truth; that truth is not a social construct, but rather it is inevitably linked to its external expression: "if you find that you have to imagine it as outside, then it is outside,"[370] he adds in 'The Function of Criticism'. Externality is a cognitive imperative that needs not be re-interpreted as a projection of the individual's inner reason, but acts, rather, as a natural corrective against subjectivism. There is still, then, a pragmatic self-consciousness just as Eliot attempts to reach that point of theoretical suspension of disbelief, which in practice amounts to faith. Yet that self-consciousness is increasingly kept to a minimum. In the end the problem lies in the fact that even if authority is external to the individual it has to be experienced personally, it is this personal experience which goes temporarily unaccounted for in 'The Function of Criticism'.

In 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual', written between 1913 and 1914, Eliot had concluded that no account of human experience can be purely social – or Behaviourist. The significance of 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt' (1928) is that it begins to exploit the role of personal experience he had left open in the account of external authority in 'The Function of Criticism'. It is a return to the concerns of the earlier seminar paper. 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt' not only sets the extent to which externality is the ground for meaning but admits that:

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370 'The Function of Criticism', *SP*, p. 71.

> Given the most highly organized and temporally powerful hierarchy, with all the powers of inquisition and punishment imaginable, still the idea of religion is the inner control - the appeal not to man's behaviour but to his soul.[371]

Eliot's stress on the external does not over-ride personal experience, or the obliteration of personality. It implies a particular form of internal mechanism that avoids pure subjectivism and solipsism. These are the ultimate consequences of Babbitt's Humanism, Middleton Murry's Romanticism, and Pragmatism in general. This concern is already central to Eliot at the time of his thesis as he states in the chapter entitled 'Solipsism':

> The more of a personality [the soul is], the more harmonious and self contained, the more definitely it is said to possess a 'point of view', a point of view towards the social world.[372]

Note that here personality stands for the individuation of the soul in-the-world – its political expression. This is statement which predates and conditions Eliot's attack on personality and the theory of the substantial theory of the soul in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in 1919. In his thesis Eliot considers that if individual faith is the glue of collective coherence, personality is its inevitable expression. Also, in 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', written while he was putting together his thesis, personality appears in a similar fashion as the connecting tissue between politics and metaphysics. Eliot concludes the paper thus:

> For our attitude in [Metaphysics and Politics] should lead to the expression of personality, and the greater the personality the closer will be the bond.[373]

In may seem contradictory to present Eliot's position in the first half of the 1910s, as one encouraging personality, given Eliot's later theory of impersonality. But, as we have argued above, in the light of Bradley's theory of finite centres, impersonality can be re-interpreted as a theory of radical personality: the personality of the non-political and non-cultural individual nervous system.[374]

Impersonality does not so much encourage total self-effacement but a partial depersonalisation. What is left is an embodied existence which stresses the primacy of

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[371] 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt', *FLA*, p. 136.

[372] *KE*, p. 148.

[373] 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', p. 23.

[374] See Chapter 2, 'Impersonality and the Frontier of Metaphysics'.

uncontaminated sense experience to be contrasted with the sort of personality he attacks in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent':

> The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.[375]

In *The Sacred Wood*, personality approaches the same metaphysical concession to the existence of a universal content of the self which was traditionally claimed by the soul. Only with difficulty is this universal content reconciled with the embodied existence of the self in the world and with the empirical method of Eliot's early literary criticism. This attack is aimed at the unscrutinized legitimization of personal opinions, as if their objectivity could be assured through the transcendental presence of the soul in the body. Instead Eliot offers us an alternative: the objectivity of personal opinions relies on the uncontaminated passage of experiences through our physical bodies. What matters is that we are a body inhabiting a world of objects, and there our personal individuation begins and stops. This worldly habitation does not deny the personal experience of the self, but it radicalizes the primacy of its experiential embodied existence as a means to ensure its objectivity. This approach illustrates the scientific purism of *The Sacred Wood*, but which remains an incomplete expression of the sort of personal experience Eliot is struggling to articulate by the mid-1920s. The theory of impersonality implies a minimum common denominator in the personal experience of the world - which may mirror Bradley's historical call for the "minimum of fact in general."[376] Yet, Eliot does not allow it to speak for itself for fear that *that* denominator might not be so common after all. The first step is to give it as universal a name as possible before one can begin to use the dogma-laden term, *soul,* to refer to a non-subjective inner check and meaningfully apply it to, what is for Eliot, the real goal: access to the inner core of personal experience in order "to appeal not to man's behaviour but to his soul."[377] The term Eliot seeks out is universal indeed; it is *metaphysics*. The trick, as we shall see in the next chapter, is to

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[375] 'Tradition and the Individual talent', *SW*, p. 56.

[376] 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 13.

[377] 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt', *FLA*, p. 136.

politicize the term without undermining its comprehensiveness; *soul* refers both to universality and individuation in personal experience, eternity and temporality in history.

Chapter 4:

Towards the Articulation of Culture: Personal Experience and Metaphysical Definitions

The acknowledgement of culture and metaphysics in Eliot's literary criticism becomes imperative just as the theory of impersonality proves incomplete and science reductive as a critical tool. This chapter will focus on the critical shift from *The Sacred Wood* to the essays immediately following its publication, namely 'The Metaphysical Poets' and 'Andrew Marvell' in 1921. This shift involves the attempt to articulate impersonality as a personal experience; the awareness that impersonality amounts to a particular kind of experience within the subject. Impersonality is a negative critical expression that defies the scientific presentation of experience it promises; it illustrates precisely what personality is not. This negativity is symptomatic of a metaphysical problem Eliot is deferring; that however scientific our approach, there are aspects of cognition which are not empirically available for us. This shortcoming becomes apparent when we consider perception as both privately experienced and culturally mediated. Science mediates experience but cannot be said to account for experience as privately felt because people do not experience scientifically, we experience belief.

This inherent parallelism between science and belief begins to re-define the personal cognitive experience promoted by the theory of impersonality. It implies that perception is not limited to ordinary objects alone, hence not strictly scientific, but it includes the worldview contained in the world of objects one inhabits. Science becomes the only adequate medium to substitute philosophy in an skeptical world where beliefs are no longer *perceived*, just as science becomes something else in Eliot's critical discourse, "something rarely found among scientists except in fragments."[378]

Science cannot stay within the empirical paradigm because all presentation of facts involves mediation not pertaining to the facts alone, as Bradley noted in his theory of immediate experience; that the presentation of facts can only be grounded upon negativity. Seeing is already seeing more and beyond what is contained within our immediate perceptual

[378] 'The Perfect Critic', SW, p. 13.

horizon. Given this conclusion Eliot explores the critical visualisation of that which remains the latent implied in all perception. He does this by exploring the personal experience implied in his theory of impersonality, particularly the importance and limits of its cultural mediation. Eliot expands his discourse to make this exploration possible; this expansion involves a gradual exorcism of Bradleyan negativity on which he relies, consciously or unconsciously, to maintain the scientific mirage of critical exactitude. I will argue that his interest in the Metaphysical poets amounts to the critical visualisation of metaphysics, evidenced in Eliot's indecision over the adequacy of the label 'Metaphysical' for these poets.

Blake and the Personality of Impersonality

Eliot's inability to reconcile tradition and the individual talent in *The Sacred Wood* is due mainly to his reluctance to state what exactly is personal experience; the extent to which artistic originality is impersonally inherited and personally created. Impersonality is, after all, a dynamic term whose meaning fluctuates between the affirmation of personality and its effacement; or, more interestingly, "neither *personality* nor *impersonality* is the fundamental conception."[379] The difficulty with these two terms is that they do not imply an antithesis. In 'Blake' (first published as 'The Naked Man', a review of *William Blake the Man* by Charles Gardener, *Athenaeum*, 4685 (February 13, 1920), 208-9, later included in *The Sacred Wood*) impersonality is something to be avoided when it represents the passive imitation of cultural ready-mades:

> It is important that the artist should be highly educated in his own art; but his education is one that is hindered rather than helped by the ordinary processes of society which constitute education for the ordinary man. For these processes consist largely in the acquisition of impersonal ideas which obscure what we really are and feel, what we really want, and what really excites our interest.[380]

Ordinary culture is, in this last quotation, too impersonal for the poet to express himself. Though this may sound inconsistent with Eliot's use of the term in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', it helps to set the limits of what impersonality is; and it is about the continual self-sacrifice and extinction of personality, but, as Brian Lee notes, "for the sacrifice

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379 Brian Lee, *Theory and Impersonality: The Significance of T. S. Eliot's Criticism* (London: The Athlone Press, 1972), p. 65.
380 'Blake', *SW*, p. 154.

to continue the self must persist."[381] What this persistence of self or personality is, Eliot is unable to define positively. Instead Eliot plays personality and impersonality against each other to evoke a yet undefined quality of personal experience.

Impersonality overcompensates when it refers to cultural over-dependence, and it fulfils itself when it acts as a check against the emotional over-indulgence of the individual personality; thus, personality is not itself *bad.* Rather, I would argue, it is, in Eliot's early criticism, involved in a process of redefinition for which its previous semantic dislocation is required: that is the role of impersonality. Lee notes,

> The idea of personality is semantically precedent even if, admittedly, the case is not quite the same as for *good* and *bad*, where the words, the 'concepts', are entirely dependent, and therefore of equal weight (except insofar as good is valued more highly). You cannot have too much good, or too little bad. But we *do* say that someone has too much personality (as also cleverness) or is too impersonal: both conceptions contain the possibility of a negative, whereas *good* and *bad* don't.[382]

The *good* and *bad* implications of impersonality and personality are not stated, yet are implied as a point of reference which is gradually defeated. Both options, in fact, fall into philosophically deficient positions, either a social construction of truth or subjective idealism. Yet the implication is that both are necessary, that, in the case of culture, "it is important that the artist should be highly educated in his own art" but not to the extent of being hindered by it. In *The Sacred Wood,* Eliot is more worried about solving the problem of subjectivism than that of culture, hence his theory of impersonality generally refers to the perceptions of objects - this had been, after all, one of the main subjects of his doctoral thesis - and sticks to a scientific tone.[383] Culture, at this early stage, is simply left out of the cognitive equation; there lies if only provisionally, impersonality, which in effect implies the radicalization of personal perception at the expense of cultural contexts. To achieve this Eliot strips the cultural self to its bare physiological underwear. Thus Massinger fails because he "was not guided by direct

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381 Lee, p. 48.

382 Lee, p. 66.

383 "Extinction goes with 'depersonalization', 'process', 'define', 'digest', 'material', 'elements', 'added to', 'use, 'obtained by', 'suspension', 'receptacle', 'unite', 'compound', 'pressure', 'employs', and of course (the germ of it all) 'catalyst', and so on. In such a context words which come from, or can easily be used in other contexts take on a tinge from the whole - even 'use' becomes scientific *use*", Lee, p. 49.

communication through the nerves"[384] and Tennyson "is a very fair example of a poet almost wholly encrusted with parasitic opinion, almost wholly merged into his environment."[385]

But Eliot's Blake has the opposite problem, in that "he approached everything with a mind unclouded by current opinions."[386] This is a step too far, so where Blake would seem the ideal illustration of cultural impersonality, Eliot has to defend him against the opposite problem: occultism as alleged by M. Berger in *William Blake: Mysticisme et Poésie*. Thus Eliot qualifies his defence of cultural impersonality; he finds Blake's automatic writing ultimately suspicious:

> The idea, of course, simply comes, but upon arrival it is subjected to prolonged manipulation. In the first phase Blake is concerned with verbal beauty; in the second he becomes the apparent naïf, really the mature intelligence. It is only when the ideas become more automatic, come more freely and are less manipulated, that we begin to suspect their origin, to suspect that they spring from a shallower source.[387]

The impersonal core of cognition must be "subjected to prolonged manipulation" with a little thought, which are inevitably linked to thought-systems which must have a cultural source. Blake's impersonality proves too personal in terms of the very cultural detachment it illustrates. Eliot must then argue that Blake requires a framework to allow for the ordering of his vision without saying, as far as he can, that this framework is provided by culture. Eliot conditionally adds that "we are not really so remote from the Continent, or from our own past, as to be deprived of the advantages of culture if we wish them."[388] However, Eliot does not elaborate what this cultural advantages might be. In *The Sacred Wood* Eliot seems more interested in seeing how far he gets without it.

Culture is problematic because a discussion of culture alters the scientific tone Eliot was trying to maintain in the 1910s: the proposition that there is an empirical ground on which to reconcile different points of view. 'Blake' makes this exclusion problematic precisely because what the poet requires is cultural compensations for his excessive subjectivism. Blake's ideas simply come through perception, yet, Eliot admits, they must be tampered with to

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384 'Philip Massinger', *SW*, p. 136.

385 'Blake', *SW*, p. 154.

386 'Blake', *SW*, p. 155.

387 'Blake', *SW*, pp. 153-54.

388 'Blake', *SW*, p. 156.

achieve intelligible articulation. This tampering is a cultural imperative that Eliot evokes through the more neutral concept of *thought,* meaning the 'educated' element which stops cognition from becoming merely "a hallucinated vision."[389]

Just like Eliot offers *thought* instead of culture, it gradually finds a further synonym in 'philosophy', which, in due course, becomes an acceptable substitute for culture, and which attenuates the relativist connotations of the latter. For Eliot the strength of Dante's *Trecento*, as a historical epoch, lies precisely in the way philosophy is immersed in the culture. So much so that philosophy becomes part of the cognitive environment the self perceives; not as cultural identity, but as an additional object of contemplation among others which can be impersonally perceived. Without this cognitive check, Blake ends up "indulging in a philosophy of his own."[390] His impersonality collapses into personal visions, as his perception lacks an organizing principle not provided by the world he is looking at. Eliot concludes:

> Had [Blake's gifts] been controlled by a respect for impersonal reason, for common sense, for the objectivity of science, it would have been better for him.[391]

The implication is that in the absence of an integrated culture – as Eliot thinks it is the case in the early 20th-century – one must rely on *scientific* philosophy instead to provide for a ground to frame one's cognitive encounter with the world. Science reveals itself as a presupposition not reducible to the self-evidence of the empirical world, but a cultural variation on its own right.

Eliot's temptation, however, is to measure the success of Dante's *perceived* philosophy in the impersonal terms of cognition and refuse its metaphysical implications. This is the subtext of Eliot's proposal in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', to "halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism"[392]. There is, however, the suspicion that in a culturally integrated world, such as Dante's, this halting would be unnecessary. He adds in 'Blake':

> We may speculate, for amusement, whether it would have been beneficial to the north of Europe generally, and to Britain in particular, to have had a more continuous religious history. The local divinities of Italy were not wholly exterminated by Christianity, and they were not reduced to the dwarfish fate which fell

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389 'Blake', *SW*, p. 157.

390 'Blake', *SW*, p. 158.

391 'Blake', *SW*, p. 157.

392 'Tradition and Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 59.

> upon our trolls and pixies. The latter, with the major Saxon deities, were perhaps no great loss in themselves, but they left an empty place; and one remarks about the Puritan mythology an historical thinness.[393]

This amused speculation is very serious indeed, for Eliot cannot help himself fantasising about what could have been in the full knowledge that what matters is what *is*, whether we like it or not. It indicates that Blake would have been better off having been born into a cognitive habit of mind validated from the outside by a continuous religious history, instead of being left to develop his own private philosophy. This subjective turn is blamed squarely on the poverty of Puritan mythology, which fails to offer a collectively shared cultural vision.[394] In its absence, Blake would have done better to let himself be controlled "by a respect for impersonal reason, for common sense, for the objectivity of science". Thus stated, however, science is a corrective, rather than a permanent solution.

The Metaphysical Poets and Culture

The importance of 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921) is one of mediation between culture and objective criticism. It allows Eliot to let culture articulate his impersonal theory of art and, thus, gradually shed the scientific tone.

The Metaphysical poets inhabit a historical epoch with which Eliot can identify because, like him, they are considered difficult poets and represent a break with the immediate literary past: Elizabethan pastoral stands for Victorian romanticism. The appeal becomes more poignant for Eliot if we consider H. J. C. Grierson's words on one of the biggest representatives of Metaphysical poetry:

> Donne, the most thoughtful and imaginative of them all, is more aware of disintegration than of comprehensive harmony, of the clash between the older physics and metaphysics on the one hand and the new science of Copernicus and Galileo and Vesalius and Bacon on the other.[395]

There is, here, an uncanny resemblance to the picture of Eliot we have drawn so far. It is, besides, the perfect place to apply the *historical sense* of rejecting a simple surrender to

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393 'Blake; *SW*, p. 157.

394 Eliot's view on English religious history manages to salvage more in 1927, after his conversion, than in 1920. The mythological lack can be compensated by alternative intellectual fruits open to collective perception.

395 H. J. C. Grierson's 'Metaphysical Poetry' in *Seventeenth Century English Poetry*, Modern Essays in Criticism, William R. Keast ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 4. Eliot had read and reviewed this book in his 'The Metaphysical Poets' (*Times Literary Supplement*, 1031 (Oct. 20, 1921), [669]-670).

previous history while still claiming a line of artistic ancestry as Eliot was doing in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. We can analyse them, as it were, because we can see the poetical and cultural stitching with a sense of relevance to our own present; that is, not so much to try to contextualize seventeenth-century poetry in its own historical present, but find a common struggle that brings the present and the past together. Eliot makes this distinction in 'Ben Jonson', where he tells us that·

> to see him as a contemporary does not require so much the power of putting ourselves in seventeenth-century London as it requires the power of setting Jonson in our London.[396]

This is helpful for Eliot because it brings forth the separation between the poetic universal function and the cultural setting of the poets, just as it problematizes their relation.

The question about the currency of Metaphysical poetry, the question of *who* is a Metaphysical in seventeenth-century poetry, is the difficulty with this type of poetry, but it is precisely the sort of historical and poetic difficulty Eliot is interested in: "To what extent the so-called metaphysicals formed a school (in our own time we would say a 'movement'), and how far this so-called school or movement is a digression from the main current."[397] As Eliot put it in 'Andrew Marvell', who Grierson lists as having written some Metaphysical poems:

> This virtue of wit is not a peculiar quality of minor poets, or of the minor poets of one age or one school; it is an intellectual quality which perhaps only becomes noticeable by itself, in the work of lesser poets.[398]

Eliot is wandering whether Marvell is a Metaphysical, and whether his use of wit makes him so. He is careful not to undermine the importance of reducing wit to a quality perceivable in 'lesser' poets. The extract above recalls Eliot's introductory comments to *The Sacred Wood*, where he indirectly praises the 'second-order mind' for providing the current of cultural ideas necessary for the creation of major poetry.[399] Eliot's preference for the incomplete work of art, the *lesser* poet, is already symptomatic of his awareness of the importance of ordinary cultural participation, as opposed to the atemporal idealization of great works of art whose mechanism

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396 'Ben Jonson', *SW*, p. 106.

397 'The Metaphysical Poets', *SP*, p. 59.

398 'Andrew Marvell', *SP*, p. 171.

399 "I do not say "second-rate", the word is too derogatory", 'Introduction', *SW*, p. xiv.

and exemplum are more difficult to discern. Eliot added in the introduction to *The Sacred Wood*:

> It is a perpetual heresy of English culture to believe that only the first-order mind, the Genius, the Great Man, matters; that he is solitary, and produced best in the least favourable environment, perhaps the Public School.[400]

It is perhaps worth considering whether the Metaphysicals were indeed *lesser* poets in the sense of being part of a popular literary front more culturally in touch or representative of their time. The point here is to wonder whether *lesser* means *popular*. They *were* popular, but among a minority for they were difficult to the ordinary reader and, on the whole, did not publish their work but passed it on through manuscript copies. J. B. Leishman notes:

> Contemporary allusions to [Donne's] poetry are few and far between, and even quite advanced men seem to have remained ignorant of it for an incredibly long time. In the various miscellanies published between 1640 and 1660, whose contents seem to have been derived partly from printed texts and partly from manuscript commonplace books, and which may be regarded as reflecting fairly accurately the taste of the average cultivated gentleman of the time of Charles I, both the number of Donne's poems included and any obvious traces of his influence are remarkably small.[401]

So, Donne belonged to a minority: it was coterie poetry. Yet, Leishman adds, "it is almost impossible to know just how far the coterie extended, whom it included, who, so to speak, were in the inner circle and who were merely on the fringe", furthermore, "the task of generalizing about seventeenth-century poetry, seventeenth-century taste, and seventeenth-century sensibility seems almost impossible."[402] Grierson deals with this problem by referring to Metaphysical *poetry*, rather than *poets*; his anthology groups poems by genre – 'Love Poems', 'Divine Poems' and 'Miscellanies' – not according to the identity of the poet, even if the poet's name appears as subheadings within each of the three sections. Eliot is more daring; though he accepts Grierson's anthology, he would like to justify the term 'metaphysical' in other ways than simply as a stylistic way of grouping poems from the seventeenth-century, to give to "metaphysical", that is, a historical function.[403] 'The Metaphysical Poets' attempts to resolve

400 'Introduction', *SW*, pp. xiv-xv.

401 J. B. Leishman's 'Donne and Seventeenth-Century Poetry' in *Seventeenth Century English Poetry*, Modern Essays in Criticism, William R. Keast ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 91.

402 Leishman, p. 92.

403 In the Clark Lectures (1926) he noted that Metaphysical poetry must be understood in two senses: "as the subject of my definition - because we must assume that every term is susceptible of definition - and as the collective title of the group of poets in question, and whom I shall take for convenience and also because I give the selection my full assent, to be those poets represented in Professor Grierson's admirable and almost impeccable anthology", Lecture I [On the Definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 61.

the tension between the historically particular – the individual – and the universal poetic function – the Tradition -, where the latter concept begins to mean more, in his literary criticism, than an idealized literary realm as it begins to seek ordinary cultural legitimization.

Richard Shusterman describes this development in Eliot's literary criticism as a turn towards Josiah Royce's consensual theory of truth:

> When Eliot first turned to literary criticism, and the pragmatic idealism of his doctoral thesis gave way to a more robustly critical stance, the idea of consensual objectivity was still operative in his themes of tradition and 'the common pursuit', though temporarily overshadowed by a realist correspondence model of objectivity. Eliot's subsequent literary theory displays an increasing and manifold dependence on the idea of consensus. Its community serves as a necessary precondition and, to some extent, also a measure or goal of good literature.[404]

Shusterman is sensitive to Eliot's development, yet he is a little over-confident about Eliot's incorporation of the idea of a 'community of consensus' as the necessary precondition for the production of good literature. It is true that Eliot's idea of Tradition as an ideal order of objects of art is being modified, as the trans-historical realm of literary tradition is increasingly re-considered subject to the societal peculiarities of each time. Yet this is not to say that his interest in the individual talent has diminished. Eliot's cognitive concern persists through his unwillingness to concede that the world is purely a social construction; this concern translates into a continuing need to understand truth, however culturally dependent, as a personal experience and not just as a behaviourist straightjacket.

There is a difference of quality between both 'Blake' and 'Philip Massinger' in *The Sacred Wood* (1920) in comparison to 'Andrew Marvell' (*TLS*, 1002 (March 31, 1921), [201]-202) and 'The Metaphysical Poets' (*TLS*, 1031 (October 20, 1021), [669]-670), though not so much in content as in style. Eliot is still struggling to articulate the historical transcendence of finite experience. In *The Sacred Wood* Eliot blames Philip Massinger for cultural over-dressing and Blake for indecency; now, in 'The Metaphysical Poets' and 'Andrew Marvell', Eliot does more than offer the transparency of the Emperor's new clothes. Instead of bearing the neural core of personality Eliot begins to dress it up with historical fashions. He is prepared to pin point the features which illustrate poetic success and he does this at the self-conscious risk of

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[404] Richard Shusterman, *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism* (London: Duckworth, 1988), p. 172.

subjecting art to convention. But he is ready for this eventuality. Eliot's definition of Metaphysical poetry, after all, relies on a poetic device, the 'conceit'[405], and a rhetorical feature, 'wit', which as yet defy historical location:

> It is more than a technical accomplishment, or the vocabulary and syntax of an epoch; it is, what we have designed tentatively as wit, a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace.[406]

This is hardly a definition. It refuses a particular cultural identity which is only vaguely evoked. Yet Eliot is prepared to go further: 'wit' has, in Marvell, an indefinite but clear cultural rooting:

> Wit is not a quality that we are accustomed to associate with 'Puritan' literature, with Milton and with Marvell [. . .] And, on the other hand, the sense in which a man like Marvell is a 'Puritan' is restricted [. . .] Being men of education and culture, even of travel, some of them were exposed to that spirit of the age which was coming to be the French spirit of the age [. . .] Marvell, therefore, more a man of the century than a Puritan, speaks more clearly and unequivocally with the voice of his literary age than does Milton.[407]

'Wit' is not as particular as being 'Puritan' but definitely present in "men of education and culture". Here we see Eliot not so much dismissing the historical detail of the seventeenth-century but re-defining it. It is a conscious attempt at accessing the personal experience which is now hiding just beneath the surface of historical epochs. This personal experience refers to the cognitive immediacy of the poet to his historical surroundings, strengthened by a historical impersonality that ensures the impartiality of the cognitive act. The right combination of cognitive personality and historical impersonality is what Philip Massinger is lacking. In effect, in this poet these roles are inverted[408]. On the other hand Andrew Marvell's historical impersonality is evoked by Eliot's use of phrases such as *spirit of the age* and *literary age,* rather than the more reductive implications of the term 'Puritan', which, however, put a question mark about Marvell's being a clear cut Metaphysical poet. This use of terminology

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405 "Donne, and often Cowley, employ a device which is sometimes considered characteristically 'metaphysical'; the elaboration (contrasted with the condensation) of a figure of speech to the furthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it", 'The Metaphysical Poets', *SP*, p. 60.

406 'Andrew Marvell', *SP*, p. 162.

407 'Andrew Marvell', *SP*, pp. 162-3.

408 This social locked-in syndrome is akin to Prufrock's. His etherised sense experience is symptomatic of his being a prisoner of salon manners in a somnambulist state on passive call to play the scene, no matter how insightful his social perception might be:
"No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advice the prince; no doubt an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use . . ."
'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 14.

attempts to refer to a core characteristic of time, where time meets the timeless, where one place meets another – Britain meets France hence Europe, and perhaps the world. In short, that junction where the individual exists. Marvell is a man-of-his-time who has tapped into universality through the *spirit* of his cultural epoch. Thus the poet's particular cultural identity (i.e. Puritanism), though present, is attenuated; it is universalised through its very historical finitude. Marvell is historically detached, not severed, yet cognitively engaged in his being there.

From the point of view of criticism, Eliot had made some pertinent comments about this equilibrium between historical situatedness and objective detachment in his review of *Literary Studies* by Charles Whibley published as 'The Local Flavour' (*Athenaeum*, 4676 (December 12, 1919), 1332-3, later published in *The Sacred Wood* under the heading 'Imperfect Critics'). Eliot praises Whibley's partial critical virtue of being able to offer the reader, not a selection of the best literature "by pointing out the most intense in various kinds and separating it from the accidents of environment", but "to communicate a taste for the period – and for the best of that period in so far as it is of that period."[409] Yet, having said this, for Eliot, Whibley remains an imperfect critic because he cannot synthesize these two dimensions: "For the critic needs to be able not only to saturate himself in the spirit and the fashion of a time – the local flavour – but also to separate himself suddenly from it in appreciation of the highest creative work."[410] It is ironic how easily Eliot's criticism here reflects his own latter predicament with the Metaphysical poets, who are not themselves examples of highest creative work, but are second order minds. It is only in the realm of imperfect art that he is able articulate his struggle of reconciling what is artistically universal with its necessary historical situatedness – its *local flavour* -, yet Eliot simultaneously condemns himself for not finding a perfect fit for his poetic theories. The question is always, not only what literature was to itself

409 'Imperfect Critics: The Local Flavour', *SW*, p. 34.

410 'Imperfect Critics: The Local Flavour', *SW*, p. 37. In 'What Dante Means to Me' (1950), Eliot noted that Dante "is the least provincial – and yet that statement must be immediately protected by saying that he did not become the 'least provincial' by ceasing to be local", *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), pp. 134-5.

in its own time, but what it means to us. This reflects the cognitive imperative which he simply cannot manage to shake off, that "to understand anything is to understand from a point of view."[411] The principal intuition Eliot offers here, and develops later, is that a local flavour need not translate into cultural insularity.

Unlike Massinger, Marvell's cultural participation is not held against him because 'culture' remains vaguely the *spirit of the age* rather than a precise cultural expression. The key is to be cognitively immediate to one's surroundings without letting that perception become subject to those surroundings' cultural self-interpretation. The difficulty is that the autonomy of personal cognition must necessarily depend on the inherited demands of that cultural world's self-interpretation. This ambiguity forces Eliot to harness it rhetorically the best he can through contrast and re-definition, almost to the point where he must stress the literary at the expense of the personal as a means to invoke a synthesis which escapes positive cultural articulation:

> The fact that of all Marvell's verse, which is itself not a great quantity, the really valuable part consists of a very few poems indicates that the unknown quality of which we speak is a literary rather than a personal quality; or, more truly, that it is a quality of civilization, of a traditional habit of life.[412]

The quality which reconciles personal experience with cultural dependence remains an unknown quality, which, in turn, is vaguely referred to as a *traditional habit of life*. As a definition this is not as unsatisfactory as it may sound, because it invokes a re-definition of both the personal and historical factors. The resolution is already contained in Eliot's suggestion that the unknown quality is a *traditional habit of life* because this habit is, by implication, exercised personally and is never totally independent from the particularities of the historical time one inhabits. Equally, personality is historical in so far as its submission to a particular time is not complete. Even as Eliot seeks a historical expression in his criticism the abstract echoes of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' are apparent.[413] Thus, Marvell fails as an illustration of the successful synthesis of tradition and the individual talent, just as he gets as close to the synthesis as Eliot can possibly articulate through his criticism. Marvell, then, is not a

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411 'Imperfect Critics: The Local Flavour', *SW*, p. 38.

412 'Andrew Marvell', *SP*, p. 161.

413 "To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all", 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 50.

Metaphysical poet. This conclusion begs the question whether the fault is in Marvell's or in Eliot's own inability to critically articulate the poetic virtue in question.

Interestingly Marvell suffers from the cultural over-dependence Eliot openly attacks in 'Philip Massinger' once the former is, in turn, compared to Donne, who, according to Grierson's anthology is a clear case of Metaphysical poetry. Only that this time this problem is not condemned outright:

> Donne is difficult to analyse: what appears at one time a curious personal point of view may at another time appear rather the precise concentration of a kind of feeling diffused in the air about him [. . .] But Donne would have been an individual at any time and place; Marvell's best verse is the product of European, that is to say Latin, culture.[414]

Donne and Marvell are at the two extremes of the metaphysical condition. Donne verges on subjectivism yet is more historically permanent, while Marvell permeates his time more successfully but risks becoming anachronistic to other times. There lies their partial failure and their partial success, and that of Eliot's critical discourse which thus postpones the moment of definition of Metaphysical poetry. However, this definition becomes increasingly apparent just as Eliot reaches a critical point where he can be more particular about history, even if he still resorts to negative rhetorical strategies. These poets are certainly *dissociated* because their personal feelings and cultural thoughts counteract each other, but there is a *felix culpa* sense about the dissociation of the Metaphysical poets, where, if we are indeed severed from a unified sensibility, it is the failing itself which delivers that endearing human condition called personal identity, even at the risk of subjectivity – cognitive or historical. Self-consciousness is both our punishment and our reward.

'The Metaphysical Poets' marks a development in Eliot's criticism towards the definition of personal experience against a concrete historical back-drop. This shift does not ultimately disprove Eliot's theory of impersonality but expands the implications of the inherent type of personal experience he is promoting. The need to define personality makes Eliot face the very limitation of his critical discourse; he cannot scientifically describe this personality but must collapse it into the rhetorical compensations of Bradley's negative method. Impersonality

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414 'Andrew Marvell', *SP*, p. 161.

is the negative evocation of personal experience. *The Sacred Wood* is an elaborate scientific cover-up of this latent metaphysical concession. In this sense the physiological vocabulary thinly spread throughout these early essays and reviews refused to be mere metaphors. This vocabulary enacts the very impersonality *The Sacred Wood* promotes, by meaning the object literally and avoiding Massinger's verbalist fallacy: "whose feeling for language had outstripped his feeling for things". Eliot's 'cerebral cortex', 'nervous systems', 'cerebral anaemia' or 'digestive tracts' are not mere figures of speech. They enact the very cognitive impersonality the essays are promoting. Yet Eliot's clinical style is haunted by the incompleteness of the description it is providing, which undermines the very scientific style Eliot is adopting because it is haunted by what it cannot reveal; haunted, that is, by metaphor and metaphysics. As he put it in his thesis:

> On the one side the history of the world is the history of my experience, on the other my experience itself is largely ideal, and requires the existence of much which falls outside of itself. Experience is certainly more real than anything else, but any experience demands a reference to something real which lies outside of that experience [. . .] everything from one point of view is subjective; and everything, from another point of view, is objective; and there is no point of view from which a decision may be pronounced.[415]

On the one hand, Eliot empirically offers us the perceiving human body as an integrated core where thought and feeling cohere, on the other, he concedes the necessity of external presuppositions in the construction of selfhood. The question is whether Eliot controls this dissociated self-consciousness in *The Sacred Wood*; whether he reveals all precisely by leaving much of it up to our imagination turning victory into what is, after all, a scientific defeat. The answer is perhaps only available by contextualising *The Sacred Wood* with later essays.

The Negative Style of the Dissociation: Dr Johnson's 'Life of Cowley'

Faced with the impossibility of retrieving historical facts in 'The Presuppositions of Critical History' Bradley encourages a re-definition of the critical effort. He introduces the negative method: "Criticism, to be criticism, must to a certain extent be negative."[416] This method is at the heart of Eliot's critical experiment beginning with 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*'.[417] It

[415] *KE*, pp. 21-22.

[416] F. H. Bradley, 'The Presuppositions of Critical history' (1874) in *Collected Essays*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), I, p. 47.

[417] See Chapter 1 of this thesis, particularly '*Vers Libre* and the Problem with Philosophy'.

underpins Eliot's critical self-consciousness; the awareness that there is always something which has to be excluded, something more which cannot be said to be seen with one's eyes, but which must be articulated. 'The Metaphysical Poets' represents Eliot's final attempt to overcome this negativity, where "metaphysics" stands for an inferred philosophical ground. This essay culminates Eliot's journey towards the critical articulation of metaphysics. Part of this articulation depends on *seeing* metaphysics in the world, in history; that is subjecting this *general word* to a cognitive test. The mechanism of this critical rhetoric is perhaps best summed up by Eliot's later description of the poetic style of Donne in his Cambridge Clark Lectures on the Metaphysical Poetry of the Seventeenth Century of 1926:

> The point is, however, that Donne, instead of pursuing the idea, letting it flow into the usual sequence of thought, *arrests* it, in order to extract every possible ounce of the emotion suspended in it. To such ideas of Donne's, therefore, there is a certain opacity of feeling; they are not simple significances and directions. In thus arresting the idea Donne often succeeds in bringing to light curious aspects and connections which would not otherwise be visible; he infuses, as it were, the dose of bismuth which makes the position of the intestine apparent on the X-ray screen.[418]

The implication is that a full presentation of the object for analysis, however scientific, may paradoxically involve its arrestation to see it for what it really is. The latent irony lies in the medical image of the X-ray screen, which seems to defy the idea Eliot is expressing; that meaning is not empirically accessible. This image seems in line with the physiological tone of *The Sacred Wood*, but its is here devoid of the scientific literalness present in the 1920 anthology of essays and reviews, it is now coexisting with its metaphoric dimension with far more ease. It paradoxically symbolises an alliance of powers between science and metaphysics, as if Eliot manages to rescue part of the scientific project he adopted in *The Sacred Wood* just at the point when it is overcome as an autonomous literal and conceptual language. Eliot never gives up reaching out for a sensorial ground for judgement which science makes initially available to him but now accepts a metaphysical dimension alongside it. Rhetorically speaking *seeing* remains the goal of critical expression in Eliot's discourse; seeing, that is, like Dante and the mystic *see* philosophy, where the unknowability of metaphysics is incarnated through discourse. This amounts to a *vision*, which is not strictly perceptual but still carries cognitive validity; where metaphors acquire for themselves a substantiality – in the Aristotelian sense –

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[418] The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, pp. 85-6.

that makes the error of taking them literally a constructive one[419], if only evidencing the marriage of the natural tension between them: object and metaphor, science and metaphysics.

It is thus not surprising that Eliot recurrently cites these lines from 'Purgatorio' (XXI, ll 131-136):

> "Frate,
> non far, chè tu se' sombra, ed ombra vedi"
> Ed ei surgendo: "Or puoi la quantitate
> compreder dell' amor ch'a te mi scalda,
> quando dismento nostra vanitate,
> trattando l'ombre come cosa salda."

Here Statius meets Virgil and apologizes for his taking Virgil's spiritual shadow for a solid thing. These lines first appear as an epigram in Eliot's early notebook of poems which have become known as 'Inventions of the March Hare' recently edited by Christopher Ricks. He argues that the epigram itself was probably a later addition made in 1922 – the poems there included dated from 1909 to 1917 – when Eliot sold the manuscript to John Quinn.[420] The epigram had already been used under the title of *Ara Vos Prec* (1920). Later, the epigram appears again in the Clark Lectures shortly following Eliot's x-ray machine and bismuth image mentioned above. In The Clark Lectures the epigram indicates the contrast between Donne, whose questions are "a sort of *Annahme*; it implies something entertained but not precisely believed"[421], and Dante who develops "in the direction of external reality which it intends; it is not a fancy, and it is not detached from the external facts."[422] The context is philosophical hinted at by the use of the term *Annahme* which Schuchard glosses as relating to Meinong's object theory which Eliot dismisses in his dissertation in favour of Bradley's. The dismissal is made on the grounds that Meinong's theory puts the epistemological status of real and imaginary objects on a par.[423] The dismissal finds its literary equivalent in Donne, whereas

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419 This marks a reconciliation with Eliot's early self-imposed suspicion of the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul as expressed in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 56. Also see Chapter 3, 'Souls and Personality'.

420 T. S. Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, Christopher Ricks ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), pp. 3-4.

421 The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 88.

422 The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 89.

423 See discussion of Meinong's theory of objects and Bradley's philosophy in Chapter 1, 'Literary Criticism and Scientific Rigour'.

Dante addresses the substantiality of the spirits despite their own declarations to the contrary at which point they are no longer imaginary but, *to a degree*, real. It is precisely this declaration which posits their existence in Purgatory, forcing, as it were, the moment of defiance against their metaphoric existence as shadows. Forcing the metaphor – and here the reader should be alerted to a hint of the metaphysical conceit – is precisely what Eliot begins to do with the term 'Metaphysical' in the Clark Lectures. This is a tactic which retroactively not only questions the linguistic status of the scientific images in his early literary criticism, but also the corresponding extreme formalism of his early poetry inspired by the Symbolists.

Inventions of the March Hare reflects a sublime formalism haunted by Laforgue's idealism of emptiness. It inspires Eliot in 'Mandarins' – written in August 1910 – where a world of unreachable absolutes can only find refuge in the outline of a shadow as concrete referent. The outline is the only place left as a meeting point between objects and meaning in a world emptied of truth content. 'Mandarins' is full of outlines, shadows, translucence, and screens. With all its contemporary implications of pastiche and aestheticism, it suggests a reified Chinese scene, or at least, North European rococo appropriations of oriental themes:

> The eldest of the mandarins,
> A stoic in obese repose,
> With intellectual double chins,
> Regards the corner of his nose;
>
> The cranes that fly across a screen
> Pert, alert,
> Observe him with frivolous mien –
> Indifferent idealist,
>   World in fist,
>   Screen and cranes.
>
> And what of all one has missed!
> And how life goes on different planes![424]

The parody is implied in the indifferent and solemn self-regard of the fat individual who presides over the scene, and whose self-importance is revealed as empty. More importantly, it is empty even to himself, an "Indifferent idealist" who takes refuge in the idea that "life goes in different ways." *Form*, here, is his way, though it appears increasingly self-defeating because it

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424 *T. S. Eliot, Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, Christopher Ricks ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 21.

represents an objectless stoicism all the more passive because purposeless. The world is still present, but empties itself proportionally to its one-dimensionality, its flatness. The world is there, the problem is that this is all *there is*. There are objects in this world but their existence depends on their imperturbable formalism. This is too the parody of insubstantial social forms ever present in Eliot's poetry throughout the 1910s, something that he transforms into a more essential philosophical escape. Eliot x-rays this world, but, like Donne, can only reveal shapes anointed with philosophical inferences not quite believable or definite, but only vaguely metaphysical. Take the line, "And how life goes on different planes!", which Ricks glosses as referring to Bergson's *Matière et mémoire* (1896) in which Eliot was interested at the time; the poem as a whole seems to already undermine this philosophical affiliation which was not to last much longer. However much his own language tries to flesh this world he can only find objects as synthetic substances in awe of their own meaninglessness as the only way into existential self-affirmation.[425] Negativity and utter night is the paradoxical handmaiden of a world where colour seems the only defining property:

> And so I say
> How life goes well in pink and green![426]

Colour being a property that, philosophically speaking, does not exist in the object but is a secondary quality in the eye of the beholder. In these early days Eliot's poetic irony[427] is not sufficient to neutralize the platonic sublime of the symbolists which underscores every attempt

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425 Also see 'Afternoon':
The ladies who are interested in Assyrian art
Gather in the hall of the British Museum.
The faint perfume of last year's tailor suits
And the steam from drying rubber overshoes
And the green and purple feathers on their hats
Vanish in the sombre Sunday afternoon

As they fade beyond the Roman statuary
Like amateur comedians across a lawn
Inventions of the March Hare, p. 53.

426 *Inventions of the March Hare*, p. 22.

427 For Habib this irony is already philosophically loaded with Schopenhauer (via Laforgue) and involves the unavoidable participation of the observer in the scene the poetic voice is exposing: "Humour itself is structured as irony, embracing the 'accommodation' of at least two view points within subjectivity itself, as a defence against the world and an acknowledgement of one's unavoidable complicity with it [. . .] Hence the ironic genesis of laughter, as for Schopenhauer, lies in an incongruity between the real and the ideal", Habib, pp. 66-67.

to return to the world of objects; to make the shadow into a substantial image. This is more clearly Plato's Cave than the Aristotelian ghosts of Dante's 'Purgatorio'.[428]

In 'The Metaphysical Poets' Eliot's tactics of absence and revelation betrays a historicism that plays with the philosophical and poetic – literal and metaphoric – meaning of the term *metaphysical*. Eliot develops this strategy as he takes on Dr Johnson's pejorative use of the term:

> If so shrewd and sensitive (though so limited) a critic as Johnson failed to define metaphysical poetry by its faults, it is worthwhile to inquire whether we would have more success adopting the opposite method: by assuming the poets of the seventeenth century (up to the Revolution) were the direct and normal development of the preceding age; and, without prejudicing their case by the adjective 'metaphysical', consider whether their virtue was not something permanently valuable, which subsequently disappeared, but ought not to have disappeared. Johnson has hit, perhaps by accident, on one of their peculiarities, when he observed that "their attempts were always analytic"; he would not agree that, after the dissociation, they put together the material together again in a new unity.[429]

Eliot, however, does not in 1921 manage to avoid defining "metaphysical poetry by its faults". What he does instead is to transform the fault into a virtue. On the one hand Eliot admits at the end of the passage that the Metaphysical poets' strength is that of unifying the material "after the dissociation". But in doing so, Eliot reverses the historical positivism by which the metaphysical poets are "the direct and normal development of the preceding age". The dissociation implies a break with a previous association. So that at the end of the passage Eliot seems concerned, not with historical continuity, but with the poets' ability to rectify history, so that poetically the dissociation appears *before* the poet *metaphysically* unifies it. Thus Eliot does not offer a positive historical description given that being *metaphysical* entrenches itself in the form of a poetic quality that makes a virtue out of negativity. Being metaphysical vaguely remains something permanently "valuable" rather than a definite diachronic development, and

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[428] Helen Gardner makes an interesting point about Eliot's fascination with shadows, which she also considers a point of technique and development in his poetry: "Although all Mr Eliot's poetry is the expression of a certain kind of apprehension, the change in his rhythms and style, which has been discussed, and the change in his imagery, is the result of a profound change within this apprehension. In the earlier poetry the apprehension is a kind of glass through which he views the world; it is a dark glass through which life is seen with a strange clarity, but drained of colour and variety [. . .] The poet's own image of a shadow can be used to define what is constant and what changes. At the beginning one is aware of life seen in shadow, a grey monotony. The shadow deepens growing darker and darker, but up to *The Waste Land* the life it darkens is the subject. Now the shadow itself enters the poetry. Where before it was the shadow that was implied, and what we were given was its effect; now the shadow itself is the object of contemplation, and it is the light that casts it that is implied. Paradoxically the acceptance of the shadow lessens the darkness", *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), p. 99.

[429] 'The Metaphysical Poets', *SP*, p. 62-3.

that is precisely the strength of its universal scope. This historical negativity is confirmed by the fact that they defy positive poetic definition:

> The poets in question have, like other poets, various faults. But they were, at best, engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling.[430]

The metaphysical conceit, where according to Johnson in his *Lives of the English Poets* "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together", is precisely the associative poetic tool which gathers its power in the face of a strong dissociating statics of the elements it tries to *yoke together*. Yet it is the very yoking which makes evident the poetic stitching, which makes the conceit an incomplete poetic virtue.

It becomes apparent that Eliot's negative description of Metaphysical poetry is that of Samuel Johnson in his *Lives of the English Poets*. But negative in so far as Johnson is implying indirect praise. These are Johnson's words:

> Yet great labour directed by great abilities is never wholly lost: if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth; if their conceits were farfetched they were often worth the carriage.[431]

Eliot exploits this negative praise as a vehicle to translate the poetic qualities of the Metaphysicals into a universal virtue, to "consider whether their *virtue* was not something *permanently valuable*". Furthermore, this involves the literal exploitation of the label 'metaphysical', in so far as it literally refers to a quality that transcends historical epochs. The trans-historically of this poetic quality – the historical *metaphysicality* of the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century – is established through a negative logic, which still insists on a particular historical positioning and poetic features, even as it leaves these features ultimately undefined. Eliot is not shy of a full cultural engagement in his criticism, but is struggling to make that allowance without undermining the universality of the statement. In this context it is interesting to consider Eliot's own summary of 'The Metaphysical Poets' in a letter to Richard Aldington:

> I have just finished an article, unsatisfactory to myself, on the metaphysical poets. The only point made is that the metaphysicals, as a group, are not metaphysical at all, but a perfectly direct and natural

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430 'The Metaphysical Poets', *SP*, p. 65.

431 Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, George Birbeck Hill ed., 6 vols (Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung Hildesheim, 1968) I (Cowley-Dryden), p. 21.

> development, and that if English verse had not gone to pieces in the Eighteenth Century after Pope (with reservations) and never recovered the Seventeenth Century poets might be taken quite naturally and without quaintness.[432]

Eliot's comments are interesting because they only tell half the story of what he meant to do in the essay on the Metaphysical poets. Eliot seems to cling to their being "a perfectly direct and natural development" cut short by 18th-century verse. Eliot omits the historical ambiguities of the dissociation. Diachrony seems here perversely to take natural precedence over a synchronic (metaphysical) version of history, which these poets could inhabit without breaks while doing justice to their label. For, if "the metaphysicals are not metaphysical at all," why keep the label?, just like if Eliot wants to halt at the frontier of metaphysics in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', why mention it? This kind of rhetorical pose works negatively, half way between provocation and false humility, on Richard Aldington, or Eliot himself, though it is not for that matter a bluff. It is, rather, a strategy for redefinition.

Eliot expands Johnson's criticism of the Metaphysical poets into a tool of re-definition which involves the expansion of the term "metaphysics" into different levels of understanding: poetic, historical and philosophical. Eliot exploits the label, not only as a strategy to restore credit to a school of poets, but simultaneously to revise the scientific prejudice which led him to propose "to halt at the frontier of metaphysics and mysticism". Not only is metaphysics re-introduced into the critical discourse, but the strategies of its re-introduction parallel the rhetorical articulation of the relation between the individual talent and tradition: the timeless and the time-bound, metaphysics and the Metaphysical poets.

Evidence for the philosophical sub-plot to the rhetorical strategies implicit in 'The Metaphysical Poets' can be provided with reference to Eliot's philosophical notes 'Description and Interpretation. 'The Metaphysical Poets' does not resolve the philosophical problem of description and interpretation, yet it is a deliberate experiment in applying critical discourse to what is a philosophical problem. In 'Experiment in Criticism' (1929), some eight years after the publication of 'The Metaphysical Poets', Eliot addresses the role of criticism as one of rhetorical responsibility:

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432 'To Richard Aldington, 16 September, 1921', *Letters*, pp. 469-470.

> Now there is an urgent need for experiment in criticism of a new kind, which will consist largely in a logical and dialectical study of the terms used. My own interest in these problems has been fostered partly by my dissatisfaction with the meaning of my own statements in criticism [. . .] In literary criticism we are constantly using terms which we cannot define, and defining other things by them. [433]

This rhetorical responsibility must be accompanied by logical rigour which yet cannot achieve completion as definitions. Eliot adds:

> I will take a very simple example with which I have been dealing myself: the possibility of defining 'metaphysical poetry' [. . .] The term means on the one hand, a certain group of English poets in the seventeenth century. On the other hand, it must have an intensive meaning, must stand for a peculiar whole of qualities which is exemplified by the several poets [. . .] The odd thing is that by doing the sum, so to speak, in two different ways, you get two different results.[434]

Eliot's negative style in 'The Metaphysical Poets' and 'Andrew Marvell' does much to deal with this dialectic but does not ultimately resolve it.

The Clark Lectures and Metaphysical Definitions

Eliot uses the Metaphysical poets as a way of re-addressing the problem of philosophical metaphysics. What it has to be noted is that the problem of metaphysics goes hand in hand with Eliot's apparent rejection of philosophy after the completion of his doctoral thesis. He rejects the philosophical discourse because of its metaphysical unknowability:

> Coleridge's metaphysical interest was quite genuine, and was, like most metaphysical interests, an affair of the emotions [. . .] In the derogatory sense he is more 'philosophic' than Aristotle.[435]

My point is that the problem of the derogatory sense of *metaphysics* here is not unlike that of *Metaphysical* in the 17th-century poets in question, and their recovery, as far as it goes, simultaneous. The articulation of metaphysics paves the way for Eliot's gradual reconciliation with the philosophical discourse he appeared to have deserted when he chose not to go back to Harvard in 1915. Eliot has to make his peace with metaphysics before he can say in the introduction to *The Wheel of Fire* that he preferred "poetry with a clear philosophical pattern."[436] I would like to argue that his reconciliation with metaphysics is mainly mediated by his criticism of Elizabethan and Jacobean poets. The most revealing piece in this respect is the set of Clark Lectures delivered in 1926 at Trinity College, Cambridge, which were entitled

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433 'Experiment in Criticism' in *Tradition and Experiment in Present-Day Literature*, Addresses delivered at the City Literary Institute (London: London University Press, 1929), p. 214.

434 'Experiment in Criticism', *Tradition and Experiment*, p. 214.

435 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 12-13.

436 'Introduction', *The Wheel of Fire*, p. xvi.

'Lectures on the Metaphysical Poetry of the Seventeenth Century'. In the first lecture – 'Introduction: On the Definition of Metaphysical Poetry' – Eliot considers, among other things, the appropriateness of the label Metaphysical for the poets of the seventeenth century. Interestingly, he does this by contrasting the label 'metaphysical' to 'philosophical':

> Why retain the title 'metaphysical'? why not say 'the lyric poets of the seventeenth century', or even the 'psychological' poets? [. . .] And the reason for calling the seventeenth century still 'metaphysical', is that the term is consecrated by use. 'Philosophical' is accordingly a more pretentious term than 'metaphysical', which as employed in literary criticism of the last two hundred and fifty years, has a connotation of 'fantastic', 'elaborated', which should not be suppressed.[437]

Eliot does here what he should have done in 'The Metaphysical Poets' but could not bring himself to do. That the term has been "consecrated by use" may be as good a reason as any to keep the label. But is it not those very consecrated connotations of the label 'metaphysical' which Eliot is questioning? Those pejorative connotations he now attributes to 'philosophical' poetry. Yet he does not challenge the term 'philosophical' but rules it out by virtue of its pretentiousness which also implies a certain deference.

Yet, Eliot's acceptance of the consecrated connotations of the term 'metaphysical' once again quickly turn into re-definition which aims to tease out the literal meaning of the term of 'metaphysics'. He does so indirectly by referring to Professor Saintsbury's letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* (27th October, 1921) about 'The Metaphysical Poets'[438]:

> Mr Saintsbury not only accepted the term, but wished to give it, what seems to me almost a *jeu de mots*, a further and more exact significance based on its etymology. Metaphysics was, of course, originally only that work of Aristotle's which came after the *Physics*. But the metaphysical is, for Mr Saintsbury, that which comes after the natural (I am not sure that Aristotle would not wish to qualify this statement): the metaphysical poets are those who seek something beyond or after nature – refinements of thought and emotion – ergo they are metaphysical.[439]

Eliot does not fundamentally disagree with Saintsbury's definition, he only worries that this critic's definition is too general to justify its use as description of a particular type of poetry; general in that Aristotle may not completely agree that the etymology of the word sums up his own philosophical application. The same problem applies to poetry. "But it seems to me," Eliot adds, "to have the usual difficulty of applying to other poetry which we should not call

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[437] Lecture I [Introduction: On the Definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 61.

[438] Professor George Saintsbury had published the first volume of *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period* in 1905.

[439] Lecture I [Introduction: On the Definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 62.

metaphysical."[440] The paradox of Eliot's hesitation over the label 'metaphysical' is that it wavers between its being either reductive or too general for poetic application. This is itself a metaphysical problem. Saintsbury ends up with a definition too general as a poetic label just as he is trying to find a "more exact significance based on its etymology." Saintsbury's literal description of 'metaphysics' has the effect of undermining its practical application. Eliot is hypersensitive to this problem of definition: 'metaphysics' refuses to fit a definition because it will inevitably fall into interpretation which, in turn, undermines its intended usefulness as a description. Eliot counts his losses and finally opts for "a definition which is admittedly not comprehensive"[441] and which literally enacts the difficulties of reducing metaphysical concepts into precise definitions. This problem is perhaps illustrated by the dictionary definition of 'metaphysics': "from Greek *meta physica,* after the physics [. . .] There is no general agreement as to how to define metaphysics"[442].

Metaphysics defies direct presentation because it properly refers to that which is beyond the presentable. Yet Eliot enforces its presentation by translating it into a term of critical description. As he pointed out in *The Sacred Wood,* presentation is, if at all possible, the business of successful literature, and by default of successful criticism.[443] Presentation is the scientific pursuit promoted in 'The Perfect Critic' and exemplified by Aristotle who "looked solely and steadfastly to the object."[444] Yet in Eliot's student notes on 'Description and Interpretation' presentation refers to the impossible stage of pure contemplation :

> The hypothetical limiting case of description would be [pure] contemplation which does not alter its object, and that for a finite consciousness is out of the question. To have significant description, you must arrange data in a new whole, in an order which was not [strictly] given in the data as data. Take any simple object you will, give an account of it, and you will find that you have given an evaluation and an interpretation. If you really describe the thing as it really is, the whole truth about it, you would not be describing, you would be presenting: described and description would be identical.[445]

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[440] Ibid.

[441] Ibid.

[442] Peter A. Angeles, *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Philosophy* (Harper Perennial, 1992), p. 184.

[443] "Permanent literature is always a presentation; either a presentation of thought, or a presentation of feeling by statement of events in human action or objects in the external world", The possibility of Poetic Drama', *SW*, p. 64-65.

[444] 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 11.

[445] 'Description and Interpretation', pp. 5-6.

The cognitive distortion involved in all description – that "to have significant description, you must arrange data in a new whole, in an order which was not [strictly] given in the data as data" – also evokes the re-ordering of the individual talent of Tradition. But what becomes clear is that whenever Eliot refers to *presenting* the object as it really is, he means something less than the ideal object and something more than the re-creation of the *given data as data*. This insight underpins Eliot's so-called scientific project as a whole. 'The Metaphysical Poets' is, by 1921, symptomatic of a development of an alternative method of presentation to that of scientific description so far developed till the publication of *The Sacred Wood* in 1920.

Eliot's problematisation of the poetic label 'metaphysical' goes some of the way towards presenting metaphysics as an object of contemplation; to be perceived like Dante *sees* philosophy; thus still remaining within the realm of scientific cognition he promotes in *The Sacred Wood*, if only as long as science is re-defined in the process. This cognitive vision is gradually shedding its perceptual sense-data grounding as it becomes apparent that literal presentations ignore the inevitable distortion in every perception. Eliot partly compensates for this shortcoming in 'Dante' as follows:

> But the true mystic is not satisfied merely by feeling, he must pretend at least that he sees, and the absorption into the divine is only the necessary, if paradoxical, limit of this contemplation.[446]

Perceptual validation of experience is thus present in the mystical experience at least as a self-conscious pretence. This self-consciousness, in the end, enables Eliot partially to rescue Saintsbury's literal definition of 'metaphysics' as an appropriate label:

> Mr Saintsbury's phrase should be kept in mind, because it implies an artificiality, perhaps a deliberate exploitation of the senses, which we shall have to examine.[447]

This "exploitation of the senses" transposes Eliot's perceptual interests – as explored particularly in *The Sacred Wood*'s impersonal theory of art – into the now more historical concerns of the Metaphysical Poets. The Metaphysical poets' *artificiality* refers to a cognitive self-consciousness which may be taken as characteristic of 17th-century poetry; deliberateness in their engagement with the objective re-construction of a metaphysical world that is not

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[446] 'Dante', *SW*, p. 170.

[447] Lecture I [Introduction: On the Definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 62.

immediately available and which they are trying to articulate. They are artificial not because they are fake, but because they force the presentation of objects to consciousness against the odds of their objective absence. Ergo, they are metaphysical.

Eliot's project is only partially successful. It seems to arrive at some conclusion regarding the cognitive effort reflected by the poetry, but historically it is not apparent how this cognitive feature may apply to poetry from other times. Eliot can never fulfil the correlation of the term 'metaphysical' about some poets of the 17th-century with the permanence of that description as a universal label of poetic success; that is, to make the label Metaphysical itself *metaphysical* and remain meaningful. Even if Eliot goes some way towards legitimizing the label in terms of the etymological meaning of the word, its philosophical connotations do not survive the correlation. He admits as much in the second lecture of the Clark lectures:

> They were all too absorbed in controversy to have time for speculation. Politics cannot wait. It is in such an age that the legal mind, rather than the theoretical mind, flourishes in theology; such a mind, in fact, as that of Donne [. . .] Religion and theology, abandoning the pursuit of metaphysical truth, develop in the seventeenth century in the direction of psychology.[448]

The contradiction is that though Donne does not belong to the medieval tradition of 'metaphysics', he clearly belongs to the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth-century. A world, it must be added, whose increasing cultural, religious and national fragmentation leads, according to Eliot, to a shift from metaphysics to psychology (a distinction he makes later in the Clark Lectures in terms of Classicism and Romanticism[449]); in short, it leads to a dissociated world. Yet, and that is their virtue, the Metaphysical poets put it back "together again in a new unity."[450] They do that – and here lies the tautology – *metaphysically*, without for that matter being interested in metaphysics as a branch of philosophy or theology. Eliot, however, refuses to use the term solely as a figure of speech. If the label 'metaphysical' is to stand the test of definition it must show a literal link with philosophy, which Eliot does not find in Donne. Indeed, Eliot's critical exercise may strike one as a *jeu de mots*, just as Mr

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448 Lecture II [Donne and the Middle Ages], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 78. This lecture rehearses Eliot's earlier review of Mario Praz's *Scentisimo e Marinismo in Inghilterra* : 'An Italian Critic on Donne and Crashaw', *TLS*, 1248 (December 17, 1925), p. 878.

449 Lecture III [Donne and the *Trecento*], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 104.

450 'The Metaphysical Poets', *SP*, p. 63.

Saintsbury's definition of 'metaphysical' had seemed to Eliot in the first place. Or is it, as Eliot describes Marvell's metaphysical thought, "a play with words which is a real play with thoughts"?[451]

Eliot's failure to publish the Clark Lectures illustrates his loss of interest with the critical project embodied by the Metaphysical poets. In the introduction to the publication of the Clark Lectures in 1993, Ronald Schuchard notes Eliot's successive attempts to publish the lectures and to produce an exhaustive work on the Metaphysical poets. Schuchard adds that Eliot wrote to Middleton Murry about his planning an Elizabethan volume, and that "when his 'Four Elizabethan Dramatists' appeared in *The Criterion* in 1924, it was strategically subtitled 'A Preface' in anticipation of the larger book to come."[452] This larger book was to be *The School of Donne*, which is finally given up in 1931 with Eliot's 'Donne in our Time':

> I know that by 1926, when I gave some lectures on Donne, the subject was already popular, almost topical; and I know that by 1931 the subject had been so fully treated that there appears to me to be no possible justification of turning my lectures into a book.[453]

Eliot's *metaphysical* project finds its critical vehicle in the topical interest of the first few decades of the twentieth-century for these poets.[454] Yet Eliot appears not to be interested in the Metaphysical poets as much as in their critical possibilities. These possibilities dwindle because Eliot is weighted down by the negative discourse he cannot undo in order to resolve the problem of their definition. Edward Lobb seems to get a similar feeling when he says:

> One gets the impression that Eliot is striving to express a point of view which is inexpressible or indemonstrable, and I believe that he did not publish the eight lectures for this reason.[455]

Metaphysics will not be defined unless it is mediated by philosophy. Not even the stylistic feature of Metaphysical poetry – the conceit – can be considered an unmistakable trade-mark of this type of verse:

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[451] Lecture VII [Cowley and the Transition], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 199.

[452] 'Editor's Introduction', *VMP*, p. 22.

[453] Quoted in 'Editor's Introduction', *VMP*, p. 23.

[454] This interest was sparked by H. J. C. Grierson's publication of his last volume on Metaphysical poets, *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler* – which Eliot draws from in 'The Metaphysical Poets' in 1921 – and George Saintsbury's *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period*, also in 1921, and continued by Mario Praz's *Scentisimo and Marinismo in Inghilterra: John Donne - Richard Crashaw* in 1926.

[455] Lobb, p. 15.

> Not until we have examined [the literary history of the seventeenth-century] can we arrive at any conclusion which will enable us to distinguish the conceited clearly from the metaphysical, and to conclude how far the whole generation may be called metaphysical and how far merely conceited – how far, that is, the common ground is on tricks of language rather than habits of thought.[456]

And for a minute we wonder whether the same applies to Eliot's critical approach to the Metaphysical poets. Is it just a trick of critical language or a coherent habit of thought? His suggestion that only a thorough examination of literary history will solve the problem is postponed and *The School of Donne* is never written.[457] Thus Eliot's interest in the Metaphysical poets, while becoming his critical centrepiece, also threatens to turn into a rhetorical game gradually regressing into absurdity. It leads to the startling conclusion in the Clark lectures that:

> It is only by grasping the movement of the whole period, from Elizabeth to Cromwell, as an integrity, that one can form any conception of the conceit or of this type of metaphysical poetry. And as the frontiers are nowhere, even in the work of one man, clearly defined, we must be content to examine some poetry which is not, on the face of it, metaphysical.[458]

This is perhaps the inevitable absurdity of the negative method, of only showing the object by contrasting it with what it is not. Is this a metaphysical method or merely conceited criticism? The answer is that we must do to Eliot what Eliot does to Metaphysical poetry, he turns to philosophy. *Metaphysics* will only suffer a historical, poetic or cognitive reduction, but it will be reduced to philosophy, which in turn will accept all the other reductions and still maintain the all-important metaphysical appeal. Eliot thus turns to Dante.

About Cantos XVI and XVIII of Dante's 'Purgatorio ' in *La Commedia*, Eliot argues,

> We are not here studying the philosophy, we *see* it, as part of the ordered world. The aim of the poet is to state a vision, and no vision of life can be complete which does not include the articulate formulation of life which human minds make [. . .] Dante, more than any other poet, has succeeded in dealing with his philosophy, not as a theory (in the modern not the Greek sense of the word) or as his own comment or reflection, but in terms of something *perceived*.[459]

The ghost of Eliot's theory of impersonality is indeed present; we are not dealing with the poet's own comment or reflection but with something "perceived". The stress is on impersonal

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[456] Lecture IV [The Conceit of Donne', The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 138.

[457] "Indeed a book of the length, scope and importance of Saint-Beuve's *Port Royal* might be written on this subject", Lecture VI [Crashaw], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 161.

[458] Lecture V [Donne's Longer Poems], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 140.

[459] 'Dante', *SW*, p. 170-71.

cognition but Eliot is already allowing for the metaphysical contamination of the object world. We do not only see objects, we see them as part of a philosophical framework because "no vision of life can be completed which does not include the articulate formulation of life which human minds make". This is a metaphysical contamination of cognition (as a *vision*) that cannot properly separate itself from cultural expressions: as politics, religion or, simply, prejudice. Even so, it is still *perceived* because it is part of the vision that must include the *formulation of life which human minds make.*

In 'Dante' (first published as 'Dante as Spiritual Leader', a review of *Dante* by Henry Dwight Sidgwick, *Athenaeum*, 4692 (April 2, 1920), 441-2, later included in *The Sacred Wood* with an introductory passage concerning Paul Valéry) Eliot begins by arguing against Valéry's suspicion about the philosophical content of poetry, and preference for poetry that induces an emotional state in the reader. This Eliot cannot allow, for emotions easily become subjective, one's "own comment or reflection". He is equally suspicious of William James's account of religious experience in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*:

> M. Valéry's account is quite in harmony with pragmatic doctrine, and with the tendencies of such a work as William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*. The mystical experience is supposed to be valuable because it is a pleasant state of unique intensity.[460]

This psychologism falls in the opposite extreme of behaviourism: that personal experience is an ineffable psychological state, "a pleasant state of unique intensity", valuable in itself. Eliot encourages, instead, a cognitive philosophy, individually *seen* rather than privately felt. The vision is, however, not immediately available but must be mediated by a formulation of life. It is this formulation which paradoxically ensures the objectivity of perception and its collective coherence. For, how can one tell visions from mere psychological states? If one can, it must be according to an outside canon of judgement which automatically makes the purity of the perception a preception, as Ricks suggests in *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice*:

> The forked root of the matter, as for many others, is the inseparability (not the indistinguishability) of perception from preception.[461]

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460 'Dante', *SW*, p. 170.

461 Ricks, *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice*, p. 108. Ricks is here referring to *Dante* (1929), rather than the essay 'Dante' included in *SW*.

Eliot is only too aware of preception. He admits that any attempt at perceiving the thing as it really is must always "include the articulate formulation of life which human minds make". But he also adds that "the true mystic is not satisfied merely by feeling, he must pretend at least that he sees". This qualification of *pretence* is all-important, because it suggests that Eliot is aware of the contradictory viewpoints which he is trying to reconcile: the Bradleyan knowledge that we do not merely see, with the conviction that we do not doubt what we see when we see it.[462] This reconciliation is activated with the idea that it is not simply the world of objects that is seen, but the philosophy itself through which we articulate their perception. Making the philosophy itself subject to cognitive experience compensates for the effect the philosophical blinkers may have on our eyes in the first place. The received information as dogma can be part of the experience of individually seeing it. The philosophy itself partakes of cognitive status. And it is in its being seen against the world of objects that the influence of the cultural presuppositions over personal judgement is checked. Eliot further develops this idea of cultural cognition in terms of Christian faith and mystical experience in his Clark Lectures in 1926 and his 1929 book *Dante* – not to be confused with 'Dante' in *The Sacred Wood.*

[462] "Any narrative of 'facts' which involves judgements proceeding from religious consciousness or a view of the world which, as a whole or in respect of the part in question differs from ours, cannot have such a force as to assure us of any event un-analogous to present experience", 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Bradley, *Collected Essays*, p. 31.

Chapter 5

Philosophy and Mysticism

This chapter will explore Eliot's attempt to overcome metaphysical negativity in his criticism as exemplified by his Clark Lectures. This critical turn involves a change in Eliot's terminology. His failed attempts to articulate metaphysics as a particular kind of poetic expression turns Eliot's attention towards philosophy just as he seeks political and religious identity; metaphysics must terminate in philosophical expression or else remain ineffable. This exploration of philosophical poetry also encourages the re-definition of personal experience, where the cognitive model of impersonality increasingly refers to a particular kind of mystical experience. Eliot uses the vehicle of mysticism to account for the cognitive experience which not only sees objects in the world but *sees* philosophy. This mysticism is of a type that Eliot calls ontological in contradistinction to the experiential ineffability claimed by the mysticism of the *via negativa.* Metaphysics is articulated philosophically, and as philosophy *seen*; its ineffability is resolved. This resolution, however, involves an additional problem. Dogmatism is the necessary threat of philosophical poetry, but poetic integrity is endangered by its becoming a mere illustration of a particular a system of thought. Eliot addresses this problem by considering the relationship between poetry and belief as a debate with I. A. Richards in the late 1920s.

Philosophical Poetry

If Eliot is still reluctant to consider philosophy as a term of critical description in the Clark Lectures, he is increasingly more prepared to do so after 1926. As metaphysics leads to philosophy, so Eliot's rhetorical negativity turns increasingly affirmative. This shift can most clearly be noticed in the Turnbull Lectures, which Eliot delivered in Baltimore at The John Hopkins University in 1933 after his appointment as Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard. In these lectures - which closely rework the Clark Lectures - his appeal to philosophy is explicit, as he is prepared to entertain the suitability of the term 'philosophical' at length. This is, as we have noted, something he had not brought himself to do in the original

Clark Lectures. This change is facilitated by Eliot's having written *Dante* as a contribution to Faber & Faber's *Poets on Poets* book series in 1929, and his re-acquaintance through the writing of this book with George Santayana's *Three Philosophical Poets* (1910). As we said, Eliot had attended two of Santayana's courses on philosophy - Philosophy B: 'History of Modern Philosophy' (1907-8) and Philosophy 10: 'Philosophy of History' (1909-10) - during his undergraduate years at Harvard University over the period *Three Philosophical Poets* was being prepared for publication. So, in his Turnbull Lectures of 1933 Eliot strengthens the link between Metaphysical poetry and philosophy:

> If we begin by assuming that 'metaphysical' *ought* to mean something akin to 'philosophical', then we must go to the poets – Lucretius, Dante and Goethe - discussed by Mr Santayana in his brilliant and admirable little book *Three Philosophical Poets*. It is clear that for Mr Santayana a philosophical poet is one with a scheme of the universe, who embodies that scheme in verse [. . .] I think that on the whole I accept Mr Santayana's definition of 'philosophical poetry' [. . .] We have both, I imagine, a prejudice in favour of the clear and distinct; we mean philosophy which is expressed, not one which is ineffable.[463]

The shift from metaphysical abstraction to its expression as a philosophy is done for the sake of clarity of style, a clarity which in the Turnbull Lectures parallels Eliot's search for positive critical articulation. It is not a rejection of metaphysics but a positive engagement with it; an engagement which must include its philosophical expression and its consideration as a branch of philosophy.

Although the Turnbull Lectures follow quite closely the manuscript of the Clark lectures, there are subtle differences, mainly due to the necessity of summarizing his ideas in a shorter series of lectures – three instead of the original eight. Consequently, Eliot is more critically assertive and less allusive. Yet the text is still mined with phrases which arrest the possibility of grasping the relation between philosophy and metaphysics as a straightforward equation. For instance:

> So I shall assert roundly that while metaphysical poetry has indeed something to do with philosophy, the connection is not found through the *term* metaphysical. Its claim to the term comes only through one of the secondary, even whimsical meanings of 'metaphysical', one which is 'oversubtle'. I do not think that any of us would be satisfied by *meaning* 'oversubtle' poetry when we speak of 'metaphysical poetry'.[464]

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[463] Lecture I [Toward a definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Turnbull Lectures, *VMP*, p. 251.

[464] Lecture I [Toward a Definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Turnbull Lectures, *VMP*, p. 253.

In this part of the Turnbull Lectures Eliot is referring to his discussion in the Clark Lectures of Mr Saintsbury's etymological attempt to dissect the term in order to judge its appropriateness as a label for the poets of the seventeenth century. The very versatility of the term proves its undoing as it refuses any particular philosophical articulation, but a mere evocation of subtlety. Eliot's increasing awareness is that he is sacrificing clarity for the sake of scope, that the term 'metaphysical' will not reveal the finite world it is universalizing. Philosophy is not just the concrete expression of metaphysics, as a particular theory, but is, in Eliot's mind, also permeated by culture and the worldview of an epoch. Metaphysics and culture are reconciled through a philosophy which is believed in. This idea is exemplified by Dante's integrated intellect, in which his perception of the object world was submerged in his philosophical thought, which in turn belonged to a medieval worldview.[465] It is a positive expression.

However, Eliot sacrifices his negative style at the risk of making his personal prejudices explicit. This sacrifice initiates a stage in which dogmatism becomes increasingly problematic in Eliot's criticism. This is a risk he is prepared to take for the sake of critical affirmation and clarity of expression and it has important consequences in Eliot's historicism. The 'dissociation of sensibility' attempted negatively to suggest a time-bound unified sensibility, which did not commit Eliot to any particular epoch but vaguely suggested a time prior to the dissociation. Now he is prepared to offer a model: the Italian Trecento. Yet he is still careful to qualify the statement:

> I have not in any way advocated a return to the thirteenth-century, whatever that may mean, but only the eternal utility, in a world of change, of any achievement of perfection.[466]

He is not encouraging a return to an ideal age, something he would philosophically understand as a negligible hallucinated re-enactment.[467] Eliot is consciously subverting the idea of a historical myth, and not simply failing to express it, as Lobb likes to suggest in what is at times a simple minded appropriation of Eliot within the Romantic critical tradition:

> As he realized, his view of history is not really arguable because, like the poetry it attempts to describe, it issues from a perception wider than that of reason alone: it is a poet's *felt* history, a myth in the non-

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465 See Chapter 4 of this thesis, specially 'The Perception of Culture and Metaphysics'.

466 Lecture VIII [The Nineteenth Century: Summary and Comparison], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 222.

467 See Chaper 3, 'The Historical Sense and the Aesthetics of Impersonal Cognition'.

> reductive sense of the word. But as myth, Eliot's history is liable to attack on the narrow grounds of its failure to establish cause and effect, or even describe the effects with any great precision.[468]

Even in the best case scenario, the Italian Trecento, Eliot shies away from positing it as a historical ideal of poetic and historical unity. Reducing the historical myth is precisely what Eliot is attempting to do. *Felt* history is precisely not an emotional or romantic idea in Eliot, and if it ever was he tries to provide it with a concrete cognitive ground which is not merely romantically affected. Eliot is suggesting a historicism based on the recurrence of a cognitive disposition of the individual towards his own age, not towards a past which lies beyond the horizon of our cognitive present and can thus be only dreamt about melancholically. The alternative cognitive disposition in history Eliot is suggesting is evidenced in both philosophy and mysticism:

> Now in all of the three periods with which I am concerned – Florence in the thirteenth century, London in the seventeenth and Paris in the nineteenth, and in the poets of these periods, whom I have most in mind, there is a background of philosophy and mysticism.[469]

Eliot's historical sense is thus slightly altered. His suggestion that «the historical sense involves a *perception*, not only of the pasteness of the past, but of its presence»[470] undergoes a gradual expansion of meaning. Historical *perception* becomes literally meaningful. It refers to the cognitive model first implied by the theory of impersonality in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', which now reaches positive articulation as mystical experience. The past is past and irreparable, yet present in its own experience of presence to itself. This experience of presence is articulated through Dante's cognitive example; as someone who is able to *see* philosophy as a perceived presence in what Eliot identifies in 'Dante' as a mystical experience.[471] Philosophy becomes a by-word for the historical present and cultural presence, but which relinquishes its historical subjectivity by becoming a perceived object in one's shared historical present. The cognitive stress on perception established by the theory of impersonality remains, only altered in so far as it includes culture and philosophy. The finitude of every cultural present is respected just as it becomes trans-historically bridged over a common cognitive disposition of the individual to its own present. The past is diachronically past, yet present to

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468 Lobb, p. 37.

469 Lecture I [Toward a definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Turnbull Lectures, *VMP*, p. 256.

470 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 49.

471 'Dante', *SW*, p. 170-171.

other times through its presence to itself. Being *present* is the trans-historical function which Eliot identifies with mystical experience. Mysticism is the cognitive quality which universalises the personal experience of one's cultural present across the ages.

Eliot is thus gradually transgressing the scientific purism of *The Sacred Wood*, inviting a re-reading of these essays and reviews in the light of the semantic expansion undertaken by later criticism, as in the Clark Lectures:

> But I must call attention, in closing, to the dilemma which every honest literary critic, now and in the future, will have to face. On the one hand you cannot treat literary criticism as a subject isolated from every other subject of study; you must take account of general history, of philosophy, theology, economics, psychology, into all of which literary criticism merges. And on the other hand you cannot hope to embrace all the various points of view implied by these various studies.[472]

There is a ring of profound disenchantment with literary criticism in these words. Eliot adds: «You cannot know your frontiers unless you have some notion of what is beyond them» and one is instantly thrown back six years to *The Sacred Wood* where he had proposed «to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism.»[473] Yet, even now, to «halt» he tries:

> So far, therefore, as I have trespassed on the territory of history, social or political, of theology and religion, of psychology, my criticism of metaphysical poetry has been seriously at fault.[474]

The fault is not his but lies in the poetic label 'metaphysical' itself, whose adequacy Eliot cannot make self-evident; it proves an empty allegory of a transhistorical poetic quality. The apology itself is empty given that Eliot is aware of the inevitability of the transgression. Eliot makes no such apology in the later Turnbull Lectures (1933). Between both set of lectures, in 'Experiment in Criticism' (1929), he had deliberately embraced the link between philosophy and literary criticism,

> I am aware of the danger that the type of criticism in which I am interested may become too professional and technical. What I hope for is the collaboration of critics of various special training, and perhaps the pooling and sorting of their contributions by men who will be neither specialists nor amateurs.[475]

These contributors who inhabit the space between theory and creative writing are literary critics.

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[472] Lecture VIII [The Nineteenth Century: Summary and Comparison], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 226.

[473] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 59.

[474] Lecture VIII [The Nineteenth Century: Summary and Comparison], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 227.

[475] 'Experiment in Criticism' in *Tradition and Experiment: In Present-day Literature*, Addresses delivered at the City Literary Institute (London: London University Press, 1929), p. 215.

In 'Dante' (1920) Eliot was already seeing in philosophy the means to combat emotionalism and obscurity in poetry. He is, in this essay, responding to Paul Valéry's dismissal of philosophic poetry:

> And if M. Valéry is in error in his complete exorcism of 'philosophy', perhaps the basis of that error is his apparent commendatory interpretation of the modern poet, namely, that the latter endeavours 'to produce in us a *state*'.[476]

Though Eliot was in *The Sacred Wood* more interested in encouraging philosophy as science, in 'Dante' he is already suggesting that the thoughtful ordering of emotion has something to do with a philosophical system of thought and not just with a particular cognitive disposition. Yet, Eliot is in this early essay still unsure as to what the relation between poetry and philosophy amounts to:

> Without a doubt, the effort of the philosopher proper, the man who is trying to deal with ideas in themselves, and the effort of the poet, who may be trying to *realize* ideas, cannot be carried on at the same time. But this is not to deny that poetry can in some sense be philosophic [. . .] The original form of a philosophy cannot be poetic. But poetry can be penetrated by a philosophic idea, it can deal with this idea when it has reached the point of immediate acceptance, when it has become almost a physical modification.[477]

Eliot is suggesting that the penetration of poetry by philosophy becomes a process of incarnation which, in turn, indicates a cognitive realisation of the ideas themselves into things. This statement in 'Dante' refers to the introduction of *Three Philosophical Poets*, where Santayana considers at length whether poetry is the highest form of *poetic* expression:

> Even if we grant that the philosopher, in his best moments, is a poet, we may suspect that the poet has his worst moments when he tries to be a philosopher, or rather, when he succeeds in being one.[478]

The poet must not confuse his role with that of philosophy as an intellectual pursuit. Santayana's reasoning is that the poet only succeeds in flashes of inspiration and would naturally fail in the sustained reasoning of an idea, yet he admits philosophy naturally benefits from the poetic expression. Santayana adds:

> When we feel the poetic thrill, is it not that we find sweep in the concise and depth in the clear, as we find all the lights of the sea in the water of a jewel. And what is a philosophical thought but such an epitome?[479]

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[476] 'Dante', *SW*, p. 160.

[477] 'Dante', *SW*, p. 162-163.

[478] George Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante and Goethe* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1910), p. 11.

[479] Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets*, p. 13.

Poetry complements philosophy stylistically because it encourages the concentration of meaning and clarity of discourse. Equally, philosophy increases the scope of what is, for Santayana, an essentially ephemeral instant of poetic revelation. They are, after all, separate activities just as they complement each other.

In 'Blake' Eliot had made exactly this point when he pointed out that Blake's longer poems are particularly deficient because they lack a philosophical structure to sustain their length: «The fault is most evident, of course, in the longer poems – or rather, the poems in which structure is important.»[480] Just before this statement Eliot refers to Dante and Lucretius as models of proper poetic borrowing of philosophy. Furthermore, Eliot suggests that the presence of philosophy in their poetry is made possible by the former's cultural availability. Eliot goes further than Santayana. The point in which poetry is philosophical is not when it is conscious of being so, but the point when philosophy is not identified as a discipline by having truly permeated the lived-world literally becoming part of its objects; when it is itself an object of contemplation, «when it has reached the point of immediate acceptance, when it has become almost a physical modification.»[481] Thus Eliot makes the relationship between philosophy and poetry one pertaining to a particular cognitive encounter where philosophical ideas are *seen* in the poetry. On referring to Eliot's *Four Quartets* Paul Murray, in *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, makes a similar point about the relation of philosophical ideas to the poetry:

> But one is also aware that 'the ideas' within the poem are not proposed as abstract theories. They are present rather as facts of experience, elements which go together with all the other elements of the poet's experience to make up the basic materials and the substance of his art.[482]

Already in 'Dante' Eliot identifies this cognitive exercise as one akin to mysticism, although Murray is unable to see this connection because he seems unaware of Eliot's doctoral thesis.

Mysticism and Self-consciousness

In *T. S. Eliot, Mystic, Son and Lover*, Donald J. Childs notes that «by 1913-14, [Eliot] had begun extensive research on more traditional religious mysticism, particularly Christian

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480 'Blake', *SW*, p. 156.

481 'Dante', *SW*, pp. 162-163.

482 Paul Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1991), p. 38.

mysticism.»[483] This interest paralleled his early studies in Hinduism and Buddhism,[484] in which religious experience become a point of reference within philosophical explorations of language. As he put it his doctoral thesis:

> Though we cannot say that we have either name or object [. . .] until we have the complete object for that name or the complete name for that object, yet the point at which this *mystic marriage* occurs is not exactly determinable.[485]

This is a typical metaphysical *cul-de-sac* which Eliot must leave unsolved in his doctoral thesis. Eliot is associating his philosophical method with religious interpretations. This association is an early symptom of the limits of philosophical discourse to articulate thoroughly the workings of cognition. Thus, faith becomes the uninvited guest of philosophy. This concession to ineffable metaphysics initially haunts Eliot as a philosophical defeat which he attempts to compensate for through the scientific aesthetics of *The Sacred Wood*, as this thesis has argued so far. It is as if Eliot wants to believe that the poetic medium may allow for a better philosophic expression which can quite simply by-pass the damaging stylistic obstacles of metaphysical ineffability.[486] Here lies the importance of the relationship between philosophy and poetry to which Eliot keeps returning. Yet 'Dante' gives away Eliot's ongoing metaphysical interests. The significance of 'Dante' is that, here, philosophy is not offered as science, but in the metaphysical context of mystical experience; although it simultaneously attempts to recapture this metaphysics in terms of the scientific models of cognition developed in the rest of the essays and reviews included in *The Sacred Wood*. Dante perceives scientifically; only what he sees are not objects in the ordinary sense but philosophy. So just as the scientific premise of impersonal perception remains, metaphysics is acknowledged as something that can potentially be experienced impersonally. If science is concerned with the perception of objects as they really are, Eliot provides *it* with objects; it's just that the objects

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483 «Surviving notes in the form of index cards indicate close attention to a number of books: *Studies in Mystical Religions*, by R. F. Jones; *Etudes d'Historie et du Psychologie du Mysticisme*, by H. Delacroix; *Chritian Mysticism* and *Studies of English Mystics*, by W. R. Inge; *Essai sur les fondements de la Connaissance Mystiques*, by E. Récéjac; *Mysticism*, by Evelyn Underhill», Donald J. Childs, *T. S. Eliot, Mystic, Son and Lover* (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), p. 33.

484 Eliot registered for the following courses between 1911 and 1913: Indic Philology 1a, Indic Philology 1b, Indic Philology 4, Indic Philology 5, Indic Philology 9.

485 *KE*, p. 135.

486 This stylistic ineffability refers to the emotionalism of philosophies, such as Hegel's, as he points out in 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 9.

he offers alter the essential empirical expectations of science. The world is itself metaphysical and the reality of its objects is one of degrees.[487]

'Dante', unlike most of *The Sacred Wood*, is haunted by the suspicion that scientific claims of describing the object are not absolutely different from those of metaphysics. This is a suspicion Eliot had already considered in his thesis:

> Physical theories [. . .] , are apt to end in mystery, in as much as the final object is often not an object at all [. . .] At this point a theory would become metaphysical passing from one object to another; and two types can only be held together by an act of faith.[488]

Ultimately, science spirits the object away as much as metaphysics, only that in science we are more capable of exercising the mystical leap of faith; we *can* precisely because science, in so far as it permeates the cultural experience of the early 20th-century, is taken for granted. As Eliot noted in 'A Commentary' for *The Criterion* in 1924: «The man of letters or the man of 'culture' of the present time is far too easily impressed and overawed by scientific knowledge and ability.»[489] Eliot infiltrates this scientific naiveté and subverts it from the inside. If the scientist can pretend to describe the world of objects, so can the mystic:

> the true mystic is not satisfied merely by feeling, he must pretend at least that he *sees*, and the absorption into the divine is only the necessary, if paradoxical, limit of this contemplation.[490]

This 'pretence' is crucial for Eliot at the time of writing *The Sacred Wood*. It qualifies the temptation to correlate perception with reality within an idealized mystical context. It also reveals Eliot's persistent scepticism during and in the years immediately following the completion of his thesis[491]; a self-conscious scepticism, perhaps, inevitable in any critical account of belief, for such self-consciousness anticipates the critical act. Faith, it would seem, is incompatible with self-consciousness, given that the critical awareness of faith already involves a distancing from the object of contemplation. It is a theoretical account of practice. Eliot

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487 For a discussion of the classification of objects in Eliot's doctoral thesis and Bradley's degrees of reality see 'Contraditictions and Unreal Objects' in Chapter 2.

488 *KE*, p. 162.

489 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, 2, no 7 (April 1924), p. 233.

490 'Dante', *SW*, p. 170.

491 See Chapter 4 of this thesis, especially 'Pragmatism and Faith' for an account of Eliot's reconciliation of skepticism and faith.

partially comes to terms with the problem of self-consciousness in faith by historicizing its development. It is not a personal but a historical problem.

Eliot sees a change in the seventeenth century, as he states in the Clark Lectures,

> in the direction of a certain self-consciousness which had not been conspicuous in the world before [. . .] Instead of ideas as meanings, as references to an outside world, you have suddenly a new world coming into existence, inside your own mind and therefore by the usual implication inside your own head.[492]

Eliot is referring to the changing fortunes of faith in the seventeenth-century. He considers that there is a tendency for ontology to become psychology in the history of ideas, symptomatic of increasing self-consciousness. It is this self-consciousness which becomes Eliot's main obstacle in his attempt to articulate faith. This difficulty appears as a rhetorical awkwardness which in 'Dante' results in Eliot's statement that the true mystic must *at least pretend* to be absorbed by the divine.[493] The conditional 'at least pretend' of Eliot's statement projects a theoretical self-consciousness in the mystical act itself. This self-consciousness becomes paradoxical in so far as the aim of the mystical experience would be to lose that self-consciousness. Yet self-consciousness in effect makes the vision available to oneself; without self-consciousness, this is the implication, there would be no knowledge of perception. Thus the very notion of an ineffable union with the divine is put into question, so that «the absorption into the divine is only the necessary, if paradoxical, limit of this contemplation». It may be *necessary* but it is *paradoxical* if the experience is to remain within the realm of language. The *limit*, thus, must mean the end of the contemplation not the beginning. This paradox begs the question of whether Eliot can talk about mysticism as self-conscious and still retain the metaphysical dimension of the mystical experience. The paradox of Eliot's mystical self-consciousness in 'Dante' is best understood against another type of self-consciousness in the context of the relation of language to cognition, namely the psychologism of pragmatism.[494] Pragmatism epitomises, for Eliot, the impotence of language to make a definite statement about the world because it refuses to take a point of view other than the emotions. The result is an over-

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492 Lecture II [Donne and the Middle Ages], The Clark lectures, *VMP*, p. 80.

493 'Dante', *SW*, p. 170.

494 'Dante', *SW*, p. 170. Eliot's receipt for the purchase of James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* can be found at Houghton Library among the miscellaneous material relating to T. S. Eliot begun by his brother Henry W. Eliot Jr. The receipt is from the Harvard Co-operative Society, Book Department and dated June 1913.

emotional and undifferentiated discourse which refuses itself a referent in the world but relies instead, on the emotional reality of mental states: «instead of ideas as meanings, as references to an outside world,» the world is «inside your own head.»[495] And thus, as psychology replaces metaphysics, *faith* becomes a word without content; the truth of perception depends on the reality of the experience as «a pleasant state of unique intensity». This is a subject Eliot had considered at length in his doctoral thesis. In the chapter entitled 'The Psychologist's Treatment of Knowledge', he considered whether there are such things as psychological objects:

> The questions involved are these: in the act of apprehension is there a part which is strictly mental and a part which is strictly external? And even if the distinction can be made, can it be made sharply enough to give us a class of objects which can form a separate science, psychology?[496]

Eliot wonders whether psychology is a legitimate science. Eliot is convinced that experience is not purely psychological, that experience is experience of objects; but equally, that the outward appearance of experience – as behaviour – does not exhaust the totality of the experience. The sort of mysticism Eliot is pursuing is the experience that is both personal – without being merely psychological – yet seeks confirmation in something outside itself – be it an object or a philosophy. In 'Dante' the mystical vision is experienced over the scaffold of a metaphysics philosophically experienced, a philosophy which is seen, and not only that, but seen as outside. 'Dante' is already re-writing Eliot's imperative to halt at the frontier of metaphysics and mysticism of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' – both included in The *Sacred Wood* -, namely because mysticism activates the philosophical articulation of metaphysics as something perceived.

In the Clark Lectures Eliot notes that Donne «is in a sense a psychologist» because his self-consciousness stops the poetic thought short of belief:

> if you like you may call the thought 'insincere', because it does not reach belief; but his feeling of the thought is perfectly sincere.[497]

This statement marks Eliot's growing dissatisfaction with Donne's poetry just as his critical enthusiasm with the Metaphysical poets comes into crisis.[498] Yet the fact that Eliot still finds

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[495] Lecture II [Donne and the Middle Ages], The Clark lectures, *VMP*, p. 80.
[496] *KE*, p. 58.
[497] Lecture IV [The Conceit in Donne], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 133.

room for sincerity in Donne's disbelief avoids a despairing vision of a historical slippery slope towards intellectual disintegration. We can ultimately only do what we can with the world made available to us, and Donne's world is, we are told, philosophically fragmented[499] something for which he is not personally responsible. Donne, unlike Dante, did not live «in an age in which men still saw visions»[500]; as self-consciousness undermines belief, so it erodes the cognitive range of perception. Yet Eliot stops short of either condemning humanity to a self-conscious disintegration, or implying a positivistic vision of history as he points out in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933):

> I have not wished to exhibit this 'progress in self-consciousness' as being necessarily *progress* with an association of higher value.[501]

Self-consciousness is quite simply part of the changing cognitive climate to which we must adapt; by developing, as in the case of Donne, sincerity to compensate for self-consciousness.[502] Thus Donne's shortcomings are partly redeemed. The possibility of this compensation is placed firmly in the present, nor as a hallucinatory past or an imaginary future. Eliot is prepared to admit of varieties of Metaphysical poetry other than that belonging to the seventeenth century poets, as historical peaks which have developed their own ways to make up for the disintegration of intellect depending on the particularities of their own historical present.[503] The strategies to compensate for self-consciousness are identified as those of a mystical experience which must *at least pretend*; one not corroborated by a total absorption into the divine – even if that presumption is necessary, yet paradoxical because that corroboration is theoretically impossible. This ability to compensate for self-consciousness is historically identified by recurrent Metaphysical periods, which, for Eliot, are characterized by

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[498] As we have seen, some five years after 'The Metaphysical Poets', Eliot is giving up on the Metaphysical poets as way of thus recuperating the term 'metaphysics'. And in this sense The Clark Lectures, illustrate his critical transition back to Dante.

[499] Lecture II [Donne and the Middle Ages], The Clark lectures, *VMP*, pp. 76-79.

[500] *Dante* (London: Faber & Faber, 1929), p. 23.

[501] *TUPUC*, p. 122.

[502] The question of 'sincerity' will be explored further in Chapter 8, specially in 'The Sincerity of Self-consciousness'.

[503] This is the kind of historicism Frank Kermode finds objectionable in *The Romantic Image* where he considers Eliot's 'dissociation of sensibility': «There are certain qualifications for poetry described as operative *now* though possessed by the poets of the seventeenth century and none since (until now?) [. . .] A once-for-all event cannot happen every few years», *The Romantic Image* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 140 &146.

a background of philosophy and mysticism. Yet the adjective 'metaphysical' becomes increasingly misleading as it implies ineffability rather than philosophical concreteness as Eliot is unable to legitimize its contiguity with metaphysics, unless one turns metaphysics into a faith collectively shared, a philosophy. And just as Eliot drops his interest in the term Metaphysical, the dissociation of sensibility's negative historicism is replaced by a more positive – not *positivistic* – historicism partaining to the disintegration of the intellect which refuses to idealise either impersonality, as the scientific correlation between thought and feeling in cognition, or Metaphysical, as its poetic fulfilment. So just as the terms Metaphysical and 'impersonality' fail to articulate the cognitive intricacies of the personal experience of collective faith because it dares not speak its name, Eliot recuperates a term which invites the possibility of a definition: mysticism.

The Mystical *Via Positiva* and Rhetorical Incarnation

Eliot's change of terminology invites an increase in the possibilities of positive definition of metaphysics in terms of mysticism and philosophy. This is the impact of Eliot's exploration of mysticism in the Clark Lectures. Just as Eliot identifies a trans-historical recurrence of Metaphysical periods, he also includes the presence in them of «a background of philosophy and mysticism.»[504] Just as he does so Eliot is immediately aware of the need for a definition of the terms:

> But the characteristic of the type of poetry I am trying to define is that it elevates sense for a moment to regions ordinarily attainable only by abstract thought, or on the other hand clothes the abstract, for a moment, with all the painful delights of the flesh. To call it mystical is facile, and I hasten to discountenance the use of this word; for there are many kinds of qualities of mysticism.[505]

Eliot shows his characteristic reluctance to show confidence in his terminology, just as he endeavours to set them in stone. Definition involves this time a crucial distinction between types of mysticism, of which there are two main strands: the incarnate poetics of positive mysticism and the ineffable poetics of the *via negativa*[506]. In 1926 mysticism offers Eliot a

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[504] Lecture I [Toward a definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Turnbull Lectures, *VMP*, p. 256.

[505] Lecture I [Introduction: On the Definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 55.

[506] Among the list of authors Eliot was reading at Harvard in relation to religious experience, Childs points out the enormous influence of Eliot's reading of Underhill, and in particular her distinction between «transcendental and immanental» mysticisms. More importantly Childs links Underhill's treatment of the transcendence of

way to articulate personal experience positively without the ambiguous negative strategies of his theory of impersonality.

According to Childs, Eliot only annotated the chapter on mysticism in William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Gifford Lectures, 1901-2). In the chapter entitled 'Mysticism' James states that «the mystic has no right to claim that we ought to accept the deliverance of their particular experience.»[507] This shows James's preference for the mystical negative way characterized by emotional ineffability:

> This incommunicableness of the transport is the keynote of all mysticism. Mystical truth exists for the individual who has the transport, but for no one else. In this, as I have said, it resembles the knowledge given to us in sensations more than that given by intellectual thought.[508]

James interprets the mechanism of the mystical *via negativa* in terms of the negative dialectics of Hegel. This is interesting because it parallels Bradley's negative method and the negative tone of Eliot's criticism as a means of dealing with metaphysical ineffability. Bradley was considered a Neo-Hegelian and Eliot was not only a student of Bradley but had read and heavily annotated Hegel's *Philosophy of History* [509] as a student. And just as Eliot denies in order to present – typified by his early essay 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*' or the negative historicism of the «dissociation of sensibility» -, James notes that it is characteristic of the type of mystical experience he is describing to affirm through the absolute negativity of the experience:

> Their very denial of every adjective you may propose as application to the ultimate truth [. . .] though it seems on the surface to be a no function, is a denial made on behalf of a deeper yes. Who so calls the Absolute anything in particular, or says that it is this, seems implicitly to shut it off from being that – it is as if he lessened it. So that we deny the 'this', negating the negation which it seems to us to imply, in the interest of the higher affirmative attitude by which we are possessed [. . .] Like Hegel in his logic, Mystics journey towards the positive pole of truth only by the '*Methode der Absoluten Negativität*.'[510]

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mystical experience as personal experience with Eliot's theory of impersonality in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Childs, p. 37.

507 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Glasgow: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1981), p. 409.

508 James, *Varieties*, p. 391.

509 Eliot's copy of Georg Hegel's *Philosophy of History* is at Houghton Library, Harvard University.

510 James, *Varieties*, pp. 401-402.

Eliot had been influenced by the negative dialectics of Bradley, as in 'The Presupposition of Critical History.'[511] Yet Eliot's early criticism is typified by an struggle against this philosophical heritage. As he notes in 'The Perfect Critic':

> Finally Hegel arrived, and if not perhaps the first, he was certainly the most prodigious exponent of emotional systematisation, dealing with his emotions as if they were definite objects which had aroused those emotions.[512]

For Eliot, Hegel's stylistic problem is of the psychological type; that of dealing with emotions as objects in themselves. James's choice of Hegel gives his agenda away in the very terms that Eliot criticizes both Hegel and psychologism. The affirmation inherent in absolute negativity is for Eliot purely cosmetic; it is the error of a style which relies too heavily on abstractions. Yet this is a philosophical tradition Eliot inherits, and there lies the limit of his participation in it.

While for James the truth of the mystical experience is only relevant as a truth *for* the mystic, Eliot insists on finding the truth of mystical experience as a public statement. For James, mystical experiences are useful because they throw light on the essential pathological mechanisms of the human psyche; for Eliot, they are interesting because, in some varieties, they illustrate the workings of ordinary cognition. Pragmatism simply does not answer the question of the origin of the cognitive experience in the world, it merely states that, for reasons of practical utility, people believe. Or, as James puts it in his first Gifford Lecture with reference to H. M. Maudsley's *Natural Causes and Supernatural Seemings.*

> In other words, not its origin, but the way it works as a whole, is Dr Maudsley's final test of belief. This is our own empiricist criterion; and this criterion the stoutest insisters on supernatural origin have also been forced to use in the end.[513]

This sort of approach fails to address the reality of the personal experience to the individual and becomes a behaviourism of mental states. It may tell us how they work in relation to human behaviour, but does not tell us how individuals relate to those emotions aside from their practical *cash value*, which amounts to an epistemology of immediate returns for our cognitive

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511 «Then criticism, if it is to be criticism, must necessarily be to a certain extent negative [. . .] That a negative criterion, if it exist at all, must be from its nature an absolute criterion, or be self-contradiction», 'The Presupposition of Critical History' in F. H. Bradley, *Collected Essays*, 2 vols (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), I, p. 47.

512 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 9.

513 James, *Varieties*, p. 40.

investment in the world. James is happy to keep up the mystery of mystical experience – its ineffability – because he would like to think that there is simply no great mystery to solve. He goes as far as noting that there is no logical reason why human beings have developed the need to construct theological frameworks around the metaphysical drive of religious experiences:

> When I call theological formulas secondary products, I mean that in a world in which no religious feeling had ever existed, I doubt whether any philosophic theology would have been framed . . . These speculations must, it seems to me, be classed as over-beliefs, buildings-out performed by the intellect into directions of which feeling originally supplied the hint.[514]

For James, the mystical experience is a radical manifestation of both inevitable human pathology and the natural compensation mechanism to control those pathologies. Mental states are thus autonomous from the world, and theology turns out to be their objective over-elaboration. There is no reason, in other words, to visualize this psychic realm theologically because in the end, for James, there is nothing to *see*, but a number of mental states to *deal* with. For Eliot, this primacy of feeling is in doubt from the start given Bradley's speculation on the inaccessibility of immediate experiences; the conjecture that it is only through the objectification of feeling that we can become aware of feeling in the first place. Eliot states in his doctoral thesis:

> Sensation-in-itself is the language of Bradley's 'feeling' or experience as more original than consciousness; but sensation in itself is not capable of being an object of attention. Sensation and perception are different; the moment we speak of 'having sensations' we have stepped into the theory of knowledge, having posited a self and consequently an external world.[515]

In fact, when James calls *theological formulas secondary products* or *over-beliefs* he is already assuming a causality – where the feeling is prior – only available because the theological articulation of the belief makes it possible in the *first* place.

Thus James's approach amounts to an internal behaviourism based on religious experience as variations on psychological pathology. James illustrates the opposite excesses of the sociological interpretations of religious experiences Eliot criticized in 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual'. In both extremes the meaning of the internal experience of religious experience remains ineffable, either taking a pseudo-scientific expression, as social behaviour –

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[514] James, *Varieties*, p. 415.

[515] *KE*, p. 67.

for the sociologist – or as a neurological account – for the psychologist. Thus James's approach results in an uneasy materialism[516]. James's chapter entitled 'Religion and Neurology' in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, is mainly an apology for scientific reductionism. He warns that he is not interested in the common believer but «in the original experiences which were the pattern-setters to all this mass of suggested feeling and imitated conduct»[517]. He is referring to the mystic and adds:

> Invariably they have been creatures of exalted emotional sensibility. Often they have led a discordant inner life, and had melancholy during a part of their career. They have known no measure, been liable to obsessions and fixed ideas [. . .] and presented all sorts of peculiarities which are ordinarily classed as pathological.[518]

James attempts to dissociate biology from psychology as a way of neutralizing the temptation of referring emotional states to physical experience, and fall into a cheap causal materialism; but also, in the opposite direction, to avoid the inevitable gaps in materialist accounts which by his own admission let metaphysical explanations in by the back door. So he adds: «[Medical materialists] are effective with their talk of pathological origin only so long as supernatural origin is pleaded from the other side.»[519] James's difficulty is perhaps to stay this side of the supernatural as much as he shows a tendency to opt for a biological essentialism looking for compensation[520].

Eliot is not in absolute disagreement with James. It is worth noting that James's physiological psychologism is an option Eliot plays with through his impersonal theory of art as a way of resolving the solipsism of Bradley's Finite Centres. This influence is illustrated by Eliot's use of physiological language in his accounts of poetic cognition in *The Sacred Wood*: «Donne looked into a great deal more than the heart. One must look into the cerebral cortex, the

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516 See Israel Scheffler, *Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 117-122.

517 James,*Varieties*, p. 29.

518 James,*Varieties*, p. 29.

519 James,*Varieties*, p. 40.

520 In *Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey*, Israel Scheffler writes: «In the earlier *Principles* [*of Psychology*], however, [James] accepts the working hypothesis of physiological psychology that all mental states are effects of the brain. Accordingly, he continues to speak of *mental states* as special distinguishable entities, although he strives to connect them causally with bodily states [. . .] Mental states are for James, however, not casual off-shoots of bodily states, without significance for the organism's life problems [. . .] For consciousness has, after all, evolved, hence it probably has utility, and James locates this utility in the process of choice», p. 120.

nervous system, and the digestive tracts.»[521] This physiological vocabulary develops in Eliot's criticism figurative dimensions which co-exist with its literal meaning as a means of overcoming the dualism between science and metaphysics with which James struggles. It involves a hermeneutic shift towards a point where language is not torn between literal scientific meaning and metaphysical figurative signification. This shift parallels the mystical and philosophical hermeneutics of Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle.[522] The identity of these authors helps Eliot to define mysticism within a particular philosophical tradition and to endorse and identify the particular form of cognition he is interested in as a particular form of mysticism.[523]

James identifies with the romantic American tradition of transcendentalism – namely, as he puts it, *Whitmanism* – and the Spanish mystics: St Theresa and St John of the Cross.[524] In all these points James's account of the personal experience of the mystic is in sharp contrast to Eliot's preferences in the Clark Lectures:

> I wish to draw as sharply as possible the difference between the mysticism of Richard of St-Victor, which is also the mysticism of St Thomas Aquinas and of Dante, and the mysticism of the Spaniards which [. . .] is the mysticism of Crashaw and the Society of Jesus. The Aristotelian-Victorine-Dantesque mysticism is ontological; the Spanish mysticism is psychological. The first is what I call classical, the second romantic.[525]

This amounts to an absolute rejection of James' pragmatism and with it the mystical *via negativa* it indulges in.[526] Yet it is a rejection conditioned by the fact that Eliot's rhetoric is clearly tinged, if not fully coloured in his earlier literary criticism, by negativity. His interest in

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521 'The Metaphysical Poets', *SP*, p. 66.

522 «[Aquinas] declares himself at one with Aristotle – and with experience – in affirming that, in this life, we can form no concept unless first we have received a sense impression, nor even return later to this concept without turning to the images that sense has left in the imagination. There is therefore a natural relation, an essential proportion, between the human intellect and the nature of material things», E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 249. See also n36.

523 Donald J. Childs suggests that «what we must bear in mind is that Eliot's mystical project is not so much to renounce or denounce mysticism as to define it. [It is] evidence of a developing knowledge and experience on Eliot's part that leads him, on the one hand, to allow fewer and fewer experiences to be properly labelled mystical and, on the other, to accord to experiences that might properly be so labelled more and more importance», Childs, p. 6.

524 James, *Varieties*, pp. 381 &392.

525 Lecture III [Donne and the *Trecento*], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 104.

526 Childs provides a detailed account of Eliot's reaction against pragmatism in the context of the modernist anti-religious mood and its attraction towards immanental mysticism. See Chapter 3: 'Modernism and Pragmatism', Childs, pp. 53-83.

personal experience – despite his declaration in favour of dogma and outside authority in 'The Function of Criticism' – is a concession to immanence. These concessions are more clearly spelt out in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) where psychological approaches to mysticism are not completely ruled out:

> That there is an analogy between mystical experience and some of the ways in which poetry is written I do not deny [. . .]; though, as I have said, whether the analogy is of significance for the student of religion, or only for the psychologist, I do not know.[527]

If anything Eliot is clearly unable to draw a sharp line between ontology and psychology. He goes on to admit that automatic writing may be reached under conditions of ill health, as the expression of its pathological by-products. This is, however, something he showed a suspicion for in 'Blake'[528]. But one must remember that this review was written in the years previous to Eliot's breakdown and consequent completion of *The Waste Land* in a sanatorium in Switzerland. Eliot concludes in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, and referring to the writing of poetry, that «what happens is something *negative*»; negative in the sense of its passivity and ineffability, clearly derived from the language of James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. This is an important concession to psychologism for Eliot in 1933, who is no longer prepared to put up a battle where there is none to fight. There is no battle, in other words, where there is conviction, and that is something Eliot is beginning to achieve. This conviction involves supplementing pragmatism with «a theory of the relation of human life to the world. And with this completion it would [. . .] cease to be pragmatism»[529] as he is already prefiguring in his 1913 paper for the Philosophical Club: 'The Relationship Between Metaphysics and Politics'. By the time Eliot writes *The Uses of Poetry and the Uses of Criticism*, he is taking on pragmatism from the inside.

The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism gives away its pragmatism in the very wording of the title. Eliot appears, like James, to limit his interest in concepts of poetry and

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527 *TUPUC*, p. 144.

528 «It is only when the ideas become more automatic, come more freely and are less manipulated, that we begin to suspect their origin, to suspect that they spring form a shallower source», 'Blake', *SW*, p. 153-154.

529 'The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', p. 21.

criticism to their definition as a *useful* practice. The starting point must always be the object regardless of its origin because

> the experience of poetry, like any other experience, is only partially translatable in words; to begin with, as Mr Richards says, 'it is never what a poem *says* that matters, but what it *is*.'[530]

Yet, on the other hand, Eliot is not so sure by 1933 that this objective critical position can be maintained, and that critical dogma can be so easily avoided as I. A. Richards – from whose *Principles of Literary Criticism* he quotes as above – intended. In effect what Eliot and Richards mean by taking into account what an object *is* is not the same thing. Because in the end to be concerned with what the poem *is* already involves a critical engagement which does more than simply tell us that the poem is an object:

> It would appear that criticism, like any other philosophical activity, is inevitable and requires no justification. To ask 'What is poetry?' is to posit the critical function.[531]

That is, the practice of poetry cannot take for granted what poetry is, anymore than it can avoid trying to answer this question in what is the critical practice of finding a theory for poetry. The critical function is the inevitable philosophical activity which informs both the creation and interpretation of a poem.[532] There is a double battle between the self-consciousness about the beliefs operating in our experience and our necessity to validate these beliefs by self-consciously putting them into practice. In the end we might be tempted to by-pass this circularity and stick to the *uses* of criticism and poetry, stick, that is, to pure *praxis*. Yet this pragmatist alternative is only cosmetic because it merely appears to overcome self-consciousness by taking the *aboutness* out of it; that is, pure *praxis* is not about belief in this or that philosophical doctrine, but a belief about practice itself.[533] This is the worst self-consciousness of them all because it only accounts for half of the experience, which in psychological terms take us back to Behaviourism once again. The development of critical self-

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[530] *TUPUC*, p. 17

[531] *TUPUC*, pp. 19-20.

[532] «You cannot deplore criticism unless you deprecate the philosophy», *TUPUC*, p. 21.

[533] Donald Childs informs us that «modernism relied heavily on pragmatism as the philosophical underpinning of its reforming agenda», Childs, p. 55. This is the philosophical slant on modernism Eliot criticises in his philosophical paper 'The Relationship Between Metaphysics and Politics' which falls «into the most dangerous of all dogma that we must do without dogma», (p. 11).

consciousness is indeed a major preoccupation in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, as Eliot becomes aware of the self-conscious inescapability of the world he lives in:

> The important moment for the appearance of criticism seems to be the time when poetry ceases to be the expression of the mind of a whole people.[534]

This statement does not stand as a criticism but as a call towards a cultural sense of critical responsibility. It is not meant in the Arnoldean sense of an elitist moral responsibility that wishes to clean the whole country before any good art can be created, something he had explicitly criticised in *The Sacred Wood* over a decade earlier. Eliot is making criticism – be it elitist or of a second order mind – as «necessary for that 'current of ideas,' that 'society permeated with fresh thought,' of which Arnold speaks»[535], as Eliot put it in the introduction of *The Sacred Wood.* Yet Eliot's words in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* above seem to waver towards making a concession to the possibility of a time where no criticism might have been needed, yet there is no romantic nostalgia here but the dealing with a necessary myth. At the other extreme, Pragmatism makes criticism - of any kind – redundant, in what is an expression of radical historical positivism. For Eliot, pragmatism is not confined to the philosophy of William James, it approximates the *Weltanschauung* of the modern world and ethically it is a by-word for Humanism. Pragmatism is the manifesto which may be seen behind the excesses performed in the name of Modernist experiment: the dogma in disguise to fight off dogma; or as Eliot puts it in 'Second Thoughts about Humanism' (1929), the point where: «the humanist *Credo* is the *Dubito.*»[536] This is the Cartesian battle-cry which takes for granted belief by affirming the absoluteness of self-consciousness.

Eliot alludes to the problem of self-consciousness and belief in his criticism of the 'inner voice' of Middleton Murry and Irving Babbitt and underpins Eliot's distinction between romanticism and classicism. In 1926, Eliot is still trying to argue for this distinction, but more and more reluctantly. In the Clark Lectures Eliot describes positive and negative mysticism saying «the first is what I call classical, the second romantic»[537] never to use this terminology

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534 *TUPUC*, p. 22.

535 'Introduction', *SW*, p. xiv.

536 'Second Thoughts about Humanism', *SE*, p. 484.

537 Lecture III [Donne and the *Trecento*], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 104.

again if only apologetically.[538] The use of the terms in this last statement has the purpose of referring back to Eliot's debate with Middleton Murry. He is here specifically defending himself against Middleton Murry's claims that Eliot belongs to the school of St John of the Cross' *Dark Night of the Soul*[539] – a classic example of the mystical *via negativa*. The editor of the Clark Lectures, Ronald Schuchard[540], points out that much of this debate went on out of print, so that in the lectures Eliot is responding to private conversations between the two. Murry had, in fact, not only preceded Eliot as Clark Lecturer the previous year, but had recommended him as successor. Murry's position is summed up in his *Adelphi* articles of March and February after Eliot's lectures were in progress.

Murry claims in 'The «Classical» Revival' that *The Waste Land* reveals Eliot as a crypto-romantic unable to sustain his longing for classicism. This is a crucial accusation given Eliot's stylistic dependence on rhetorical negativity, which then appears embodied in the romantic mysticism of St John of the Cross and St Theresa. It is interesting because it demands a closer look at Eliot's strategies which both adopt and subvert the medium he inherits. In a sense, Murry's accusations create a problem where there is none to solve. Habib notes that Eliot «acknowledged that he lived in a 'romantic' age.»[541] For him, such an acknowledgment lies at the heart of an ironic relationship with his romantic heritage, which he plays against his classic pretensions:

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538 I think Romanticism and Classicism are words Eliot uses purely for political purposes. They reflect the political expression of cognitive dispositions of inwardness versus external worldviews. These terms are literary only insofar as literature is here used as a useful exemplary medium to express positions that go beyond the merely literary. I find any discussion about Eliot and Romantic poetry useless if only to illustrate this point. Romanticism as a useful term for literary criticism has wasted away, and Eliot does much to encourage this demise.

539 For an extended analysis of Eliot's interest in the Spanish mystic see Pablo Zamorano, *La Mística de la Noche Oscura: San Juan de la Cruz and T. S. Eliot* (Servicio de Publicaciones, Universidad de Huelva, 1996) in which the author argues Eliot's participation in John of the Cross's negative mysticism. In Paul Murray's *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, Eliot's engagement with this mystical tradition goes unchallenged. Of course Murray is referring to Eliot's sources in *Four Quartets*, and it is true that this poem contains parts of *Dark Night of the Soul* (see Murray, Chapter 6: 'The Influence of St John of the Cross', pp. 88-100), but it is never established the extent to which Eliot fully adopts the *via negativa*, as poet's sources neither proves or disproves allegiances.

540 See 'Editor's Introduction', *VMP*, 75n & 104n.

541 M. A. R. Habib, *The Early T. S. Eliot and Western Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 60.

> The task of literature is precisely to achieve that unity between the subjective and the objective which has suffered dissolution in real life. And it must do this by an ironic process: by incorporating the romantic emphasis on subjectivity within a larger equivalence which reinstates a classical emphasis on the object.[542]

For Habib, irony is Eliot's principal rhetorical weapon in the reconciliation of opposites; the last line of effective defence in an age of ideological poverty, and which also implies one's inevitable participation in the terms one is re-defining. Hence, Eliot's ironic relationship with romanticism can deliver no resolution, in so far as irony offers no definitive alternative to a problem. It can only make evident a dissatisfaction, and suggest a resolution which it fails to openly define. This dissatisfaction translates into the demise of the method itself. Thus, in the end, the distinction between romanticism and classicism tends towards meaninglessness as the circularity of irony goes on *ad infinitum*.[543] Irony collapses into the very metaphysical ineffability and negativity Eliot is trying to over-come. So in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* he concludes:

> That is one of the dangers of expressing one's meaning in terms of 'Romanticism': it is a term which is constantly changing in different contexts, and which is now limited to what appear to be purely literary and purely local problems, now expanding to cover almost the whole of the life of a time and of nearly the whole world.[544]

Typically Eliot is complaining about the lack of definition of his terms. More importantly the dichotomy of romanticism and classicism forces Eliot into accepting the subjective-objective dualism from which he wants to escape. The 'outside voice' in classicism, overcome with the weight of external authority and dogma, fails to capture his interest in personal experience as belief; belief, moreover, to be distinguished from the 'inner voice' of romanticism. Let us remember that *impersonality* does not imply, for Eliot, the end of personality but attempts to articulate an as yet indefinite personal experience. Habib quite rightly points out that

> Impersonality is not opposed to personal experience but rather obtains an ironic relationship with it, extending and completing it.[545]

Yet, one wonders if irony can ever be expected to complete the relations it sustains. It is negative in so far as it relies for meaning, not on definition, but on connotation. Thus, it must, in the end, give way to allow for a positive definition of personal experience, which

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[542] Habib, p. 182.

[543] Habib notes that the metaphysical resolution of subjectivity and objectivity must in the end depend «on our ability to overcome irony», Habib, p. 145.

[544] *TUPUC*, p. 128.

[545] Habib, p. 180.

'impersonality' fails to provide. The critical shift in the Clark Lectures can be seen as yet a further experiment in criticism and critical terminology. Mysticism enables Eliot to articulate personal experience just as part of his critical vocabulary – romanticism and classicism, personality and impersonality – was expiring.

Furthermore, mysticism allows Eliot to distinguish between the metaphysics at whose frontier he wanted to halt in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', and the 'metaphysics' he wanted to promote in 'The Metaphysical Poets'. In 'Dante' this distinction is experimentally projected into types of mysticism which take the form of two forms of cognition; the mysticism that *perceives* and the mysticism that *feels*. In the Clark Lectures the distinction is concretised philosophically in terms of ontology (or metaphysics) as opposed to psychologism. And this philosophical concretization is only possible as a result of Eliot's construction of a critical frame where this terminology can fit and be understood, not as philosophical abstractions, but with reference to concrete cognitive exercises, which he can now correlate to varieties of mystical experience. The question is perhaps whether one can argue that Eliot's overcoming of the negativity of critical self-consciousness – the inability to describe and affirm absolutely – is not itself a '*Methode der Absoluten Negativität*'. And that in his search to achieve the positive function of belief he is only arriving at absolute doubt. Because, if self-consciousness must undermine the act of faith, then is it not a temptation to make *that* self-consciousness the absolute measure itself? In other words, does Eliot's negative way ever truly turn positive? Or is the negative pull too strong to be turned around? Part of the problem I am raising involves the fact that positive affirmation must inevitably establish an exclusivity against that not included in its definition. This struggle with affirmation is evidenced in Eliot's attempt to resolve the relationship between belief and dogma.

Mysticism allows Eliot to describe the relation between belief (here as the act of believing) and dogma (that which is believed) in ways that classicism would not do by virtue of its stress on behaviour rather than experience. While James wonders doubtfully: «Do mystical states establish the truth of those theological affections in which the saintly life has its

root?»[546], Eliot cannot dismiss the metaphysical claims of belief as mere emotions, ultimately unrelated to a belief system, be it philosophy or theology. He is quite clear, though, that one cannot «preserve emotions without the beliefs with which their history has been involved.»[547] Claims about the truth of our experiences are real and involve referents in-the-world; they must be problematized, precisely in order to get them right. This, according to Eliot, requires a positive theory of the relation of humans to the world: a dogma. The drawback is that, the moment one's belief is concretised in dogma, one cannot expect to communicate to people who do not share that dogma. We return to the Bradleyan problem of the cognitive privacy of the finite centre, now at a cultural level. No matter how many people are included within one's realm of intelligibility, there always seem to be people falling off the edges. Eliot's requirement of a positive theory of the relation of the human being to the world can easily encourage the exclusion of the uninitiated through the ineffability of one's dogma to others: *ergo* negativity.

Richards and the Theory of Belief

The role of I. A. Richards in this new critical stage is pertinent. Richards, a young Cambridge don at the School of English, had met Eliot in 1920. Having read and been impressed by Eliot's *Ara Vos Prec*, he tried and failed to lure Eliot into academic life.[548] In 1926 Richards was present at the Clark Lectures among a number of young academics increasingly holding Eliot as their mentor in the new age of English Studies. Among these Ronald Schuchard mentions: E. M. W. Tillyard, Basil Willey, H. S. Bennet, Mansfield Forbes, Aubrey Attwater and F. R. Leavis.[549] Richards's criticism of *The Waste Land* parallels Murry's attack, namely in that, despite the objectivist classicism of his criticism, his poetry indulges in ineffability of emotion.[550] In Richards's words – which Eliot quotes in *Dante* (1929) – it amounts to a

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546 James, *Varieties*, p. 401.

547 *TUPUC*, p. 135.

548 Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 99-100.

549 'Editor's Introduction', *VMP*, pp. 11-17.

550 Perhaps Paul Murray, in *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, could do better to address more clearly the role of Eliot's poetic expression against that of his criticism before he uses the former as sufficient ground to determine Eliot's mystical allegiances. It is worth considering that Eliot's poetry is a place where he allows himself to push the tensions between his personal experience and his *credo* much further than he does in his criticism; but that without the orthodoxy of his criticism his poetic expression would find no way of putting his personal experience into

complete severance between poetry and all beliefs.[551] There is, however, an important difference between the comments of Murry and Richards. Murry holds Eliot back to a defensive classicism which perpetuates the simplified dualism between the inner and the outer he wants to leave behind. On the other hand, Richards encourages the new critical voice Eliot is pursuing; one which demands a new terminology and which Eliot obliges by borrowing from the contemporary academic debate about the relationship between poetry and belief.[552]

Eliot takes up Richards's challenge in *Dante* – in the notes to chapter two on the 'Paradiso'. Eliot has no difficulty in admitting a degree of separation between poetry and belief so that:

> *If* there is 'literature, *if* there is 'poetry', then it must be possible to have full literary or poetic appreciation without sharing the beliefs of the poet [. . .] I deny, in short, that the reader must share the beliefs of the poet in order to enjoy the poetry fully.[553]

Eliot provisionally concedes the point and he does so for two reasons. On the one hand he is aware that not to admit this point is to fall into radical dogmatism. On the other hand it allows him to maintain a premise to which he can add modifications; modify to express more precisely what he means by the relation between poetry and belief without falling into defending a position he does not support as such. Thus, no sooner, has he conceded the theoretical point that there is no need to share the belief of the poet to understand the poetry, that he adds: we *can* understand each other despite our beliefs, but we have, at the same time, to admit that understanding must terminate in belief. This is how Eliot puts it:

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words in the first place. Criticism is, for Eliot, the construction-site of orthodoxy whereas poetry is the place of heresy.

551 *Dante*, p. 58.

552 It is worth reading Part Two 'Empiricism and Idealism in the Cultural Theory of I. A. Richards' in Pamela McCallum's *Literature and Method: Towards a Critique of I. A Richards, T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis*, specially the section entitled 'The initial formulation of Consciousness: The Challenge of Behaviourism'. Here Richards is described as actively participating in the debate about the nature of human consciousness incited by the growing science of psychology. Richards was, McCallum tells us, specially worried about the problem posed by the Behaviourist challenge in the face of the creative function of the human mind: «If all human action, including thought, can be circumscribed within a mechanistic and determinist stimulus-response model, then the possibility of a creative and active consciousness is put into question» (McCallum, p. 43). Eliot was not thinking so much about the creative function as much as the very possibility of personal experience in the context of religious orthodoxy as in his graduate paper 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual'. This is also a problem, as we saw above, which tinges William James' attempt to account for mystical experiences without either giving in to metaphysical presumptions nor to neurological accounts, which encourages the pragmatic method Eliot criticizes.

553 *Dante*, p. 57.

> But if you yourself are convinced of a certain view of life, then irresistibly and inevitably believe that if anyone else comes to 'understand' it fully, his understanding must terminate in belief [. . .] So I can only conclude that I cannot, in practice, wholly separate my poetic appreciation from my personal beliefs.[554]

In short, Eliot is making a point about sincerity[555]; that it is naive to think that in practice understanding is achievable apart from the beliefs that lead us to that understanding. That is not to say that we have to share the beliefs of the poet to understand him, but that any understanding inevitably terminates in something akin to the sharing the belief of the interlocutor. It is insincere to deny this, in so far as it is insincere for people to pretend that they lead their lives apart from beliefs or dogmas. Eliot goes on to identify a latent dogmatism in Richards' *Practical Criticism*: «We may observe, in passing, the intense religious seriousness of Mr Richards's attitude towards poetry.»[556]

Richards shares James' predilection for separating thoughts from feelings. In James this position transpires into the condemnation that religious feeling should ever adopt theological or philosophical expression, and in Richards, the less drastic solution, that one should distinguish the emotional response from the objective response to poetry, that is, between what he calls critical and technical literary criticism:

> In a full critical statement which states not only that an experience is valuable in certain ways, but also that it is caused by certain features in the contemplated object, the part which describes the value of an experience we shall call the *critical* part. That which describes the object we shall call the *technical* part.[557]

Richards is promoting a critical dualism where the emotive element contained in the *critical* is further devoid of any metaphysical value by being explained psychologically. Richards adds:

> We shall endeavour in what follows to show that the critical remarks are merely a branch of psychological remarks, and that no special ethical or metaphysical ideas need be introduced to explain value.[558]

Thus Richards encourages the severance of poetry from all beliefs, a view he erroneously projects, as far as Eliot is concerned, onto *The Waste Land.* The parallel with James extends to

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554 *Dante*, p. 58-59.

555 Although Donne «is in a sense a psychologist», Eliot develops the idea of *sincerity* as a means to rescue the latency of belief as a sensual intuition in Donne's poetry: «if you like you may call the thought 'insincere', because it does not reach belief; but his feeling of the thought is perfectly sincere», Lecture IV [The Conceit in Donne', The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 133). Sincerity is thus for Eliot the last line of defence of belief in a self-conscious age where faith is no longer possible.

556 *TUPUC*, p. 132.

557 I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1926), p. 23.

558 *Principles of Literary Criticism* , p. 23.

the admission that emotions may be objectless and that they should be recognized as such rather than be misinterpreted by providing them with an unholy objective alliance of a metaphysical kind:

> That an objectless belief is a ridiculous or incomplete thing is a prejudice derived only from confusion [. . .] When they are kept from tampering with the development of reference such emotional attitudes may be, as revelation doctrines in such strange forms maintain, among the most important and valuable effects [. . .] which the arts can produce.[559]

The worship of emotional ineffability, together with a latent romanticism lurking under the objective veil of science is here – like in James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* – clear to Eliot. In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* Eliot compares Richards's latent psychologism in terms of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius[560], who along with St John and St Teresa Eliot are considered as romantic mystics in the Clark Lectures.[561]

In *Dante* (1930), Eliot not only shrugs off Richards's dualist claims, but insists on the cognitive link between emotions to objects in all perception. This link is exercised by belief. Eliot adds:

> When I speak of understanding, I do not mean merely knowledge of books or words, any more than I mean belief: I mean a state of mind in which one sees certain beliefs.[562]

For Eliot the belief involved in our perception of the world and the belief in a particular dogma overlap. One sees the one as one sees the other. More importantly, the inference is that philosophical belief is directly involved in perception insofar as it contributes to organize human emotions arising from our encounter with the world. In a sense, what one believes is only relevant for the person who holds that belief, yet the reader of poetry must acknowledge this fact and try to understand the extent to which it makes a difference to the poet:

> My point is that you cannot afford to *ignore* Dante's philosophical and theological beliefs, or to skip the passages which express them most clearly; but that on the other hand you are not called upon to believe

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559 *Principles of Literary Criticism*, pp. 280-81.

560 «Now for the points.

I. *Man's Loneliness (the isolation of the human situation).*

II. *The facts of birth and of death, in their inexplicable oddity.*

III. *The inconceivable immensity of the Universe.*

IV. *Man's place in the perspective of time.*

V. *The Enormity (sc. enormousness) of man's ignorance»*, *TUPUC*, pp. 132-133.

561 Lecture II [Donne and the Middle Ages], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 84.

562 *Dante*, p. 44.

> them yourself [. . .] If you can read the poetry as poetry, you will 'believe' in Dante's theology exactly as you believe in the physical reality of his journey; that is, you suspend both belief and disbelief.[563]

The ambiguity Eliot creates is in the suggestion that, though the reader is not called upon believing, he is neither in a position to disbelieve the belief which shapes the vision of others. The reader is ultimately called upon seeing. And seeing is precisely what the poet does through his belief. So that seeing is in a way already sharing the poet's understanding and his faith beyond the particularities of his dogma which, in turn, undoubtedly makes the vision possible. Once belief permeates the cognitive act of seeing the detailing of that particular dogma is secondary. Thus Dante's «private belief becomes a different thing in becoming poetry», as he makes us see what he saw.[564] In a sense we do not have to share the poet's beliefs to understand the poetry, for the vision, once achieved, is not a mere illustration of dogma but a vision for which we only need our eyes to understand.

The parallel difficulty for Eliot is modern self-conscious psychologism because it prioritises the critical function over faith – a faith which Eliot insists on linking with the workings of ordinary cognition. In fact it is the increasing separation of philosophy from theology which Eliot blames for the rise in critical self-consciousness; without faith philosophy ceases to be an object which can be seen and spirits itself away as a mere feeling. This argument is very similar to Etienne Gilson[565] in *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* on the medieval debate between Augustinians and Thomists on the relation of faith and philosophy:

> Just as certain Augustinians regard Thomism as false, because not a Christian philosophy, so certain Thomists reply that it is true but not in the least because it is Christian. They are forced, in fact, into this position; because, once reason, as regards its exercise, has been divorced from faith, all intrinsic relations between Christianity and philosophy become a contradiction.[566]

Eliot has to deal with a similar situation by being forced into a position in which he has to choose between dogma or mere poetic (or religious) emotions; he is engaged in choosing the former without attempting to be dogmatic.

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563 *Dante*, pp. 42-43.

564 *Dante*, p. 43.

565 Schuchard notes Eliot's reading for the Clark Lectures: Gilson's 'St Thomas' in *Les Moralisttes Chrétiens* (1925) and *La Philosophie au moyen âge* (1922), the latter particularly in relation to Eliot's review of Maurice de Wulf's *History of Medieval Philosophy* in the *Times Literary Review* (16th December, 1926), *VMP*, p. 77, n33.

566 Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 7. Eliot refers directly to Gilson's *La Philosophie au moyen âge* in which the author encourages the idea of a continuous philosophical tradition from the Middle Ages to modern times. See Lecture II [Donne and the Middle Ages], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 77.

This is particularly illustrated by Eliot's strategies in *Dante* (1929) of arguing for the importance of dogma in poetry without saying that poetry has to be dogmatic. This problem is resolved by Eliot's critical turn from Metaphysical poetry to 'philosophical' poetry. In the latter case, a poetry not practiced by poets who illustrate a philosophy or philosophers who write poetry, but by poets who *see* through a philosophy because they believe it as theology. It implies a philosophy which is itself a separate object of cognitive intelligibility from poetry and which, by virtue of being a separate object, can be *seen*, and not merely privately felt. It is this cognitive dimension of belief which attenuates the privacy of one's experience. If we are able *see* our beliefs, we can make other see more successfully than we can make others feel what we feel. Thus metaphysics is concretised through philosophical belief without falling into dogmatism. This approach finally revises the classicism of 'The Function of Criticism' by making apparent the link between ordinary cognition and the operations of external dogma in human experience.[567]

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567 See'Metaphysical Politics' in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Chapter 6

Eliot's Allegorical Rhetoric

As Eliot reaches 1930 he begins to make closer references to philosophy. Yet he falls short of embracing its discourse explicitly. This is symptomatic of Eliot's on-going wariness about dogmatism. The closest he gets to philosophical explanations is when he proposes their impracticability within his criticism, as in 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca' (1927):

> What I have said could be expressed more exactly, but at much greater length, in philosophical language: it would enter into the department of philosophy which might be called the Theory of Belief (which is not psychology but philosophy proper) – the department in which Meinong and Husserl have made some pioneer investigation.[568]

This statement has two functions: it reveals the philosophical background underpinning Eliot's criticism, but it also delimits the role philosophy is still playing in his criticism. Eliot is explicitly indicating that his critical discourse is an alternative discourse. He is not interested in describing the role of philosophical belief through criticism because that is a philosophical pursuit. Eliot still refuses to be merely philosophical, as if he wanted to go further, to *see* these philosophies even at the expense of the exactitude promised by philosophical discourse. Thus Eliot's critical discourse reveals a poetic objective, that of replacing, not embodying philosophy.

It is worth noting Eliot's choice of philosophers above: they are phenomenologists concerned with the foundation of human cognition in the world of objects; something, Eliot tells us, parallels a theory of belief. Eliot had read Husserl's *Logical Investigations* the summer he spent at Marburg in 1914 and studied it at Harvard where he had audited H. T. Costello's Philosophy 8a on current logical theories in October of the previous year.[569] He had also dealt

[568] T. S. Eliot's 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', *SE*, p. 138.

[569] Eliot's notes for the course are at the Houghton Library. Lacking permission to look at these I have consulted E. W. Friend's notes on the same course at the Pusey Library, Harvard Archives: Husserl's logic and phenomenology was the subject set for 24th November 1913. Eliot's annotated copy of Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations* is at the London Library, which he read in the summer of 1914. His influence has been traced to 'Hamlet and His Problems' and the objective correlative by John M. Steadman in 'Eliot and Husserl: The Origin of the *Objective Correlative*', *Notes and Queries*, 203 (June, 1958): «As early as 1900 and 1901 Edmund Husserl had employed the terms 'gegenstandliches Korrelat' and 'objectives Korrelat' in *Logische Untersuchungen* (Third Edition, Halle a.d.S, 1922, I, 245, 248-249; II, 25). Distinguishing sharply between categories of meaning ('die Bedeutungskategorien') on the one hand and objective categories ('diegegenständlichen Kategorien') on the other,

with Alexus von Meinong's theory of objects in detail in his doctoral thesis.[570] Eliot's doctrinal interests in belief are still very much seeking an overlap with the problems of cognition he had studied as a philosophy post-graduate. Yet he now refrains from rehearsing their philosophical arguments. Instead, Eliot recovers philosophy by contextualising it in theological hermeneutics. The aim of the recovery becomes a rhetorical exercise which aims to end up seeing philosophy *through* his criticism. The aim of this chapter is to investigate how Eliot seeks an expression for the sort of philosophical problems he is interested in without falling into the private and exclusive language of philosophy. He does this by stressing the cognitive dimension of belief as illustrated by the allegorical hermeneutics of Dante's mysticism. I will argue that Eliot projects these allegorical strategies onto a renewed understanding of rhetoric.

Allegory as a Rhetorical Strategy

John Paul Riquelme has suggested a method of interpreting allegory in te context of Eliot's criticism; he appropriates the term to evoke what he sees as Eliot rhetorical strategies of deferral:

> The allegorical procedures of Eliot's critical writing, which go unannounced, are more diffuse [. . .] This sort of allegorical method relies in continual deferrals of meaning in response to multiple, interlocking issues and to unanswered, unanswerable questions. The method involves shifting always to another provisional perspective and another context of interpretation as a recognition that many such contexts and perspectives are possible. Such an allegory, which leads to potentially endless shifting among contexts of meaning, is a modern development, to be distinguished from its medieval precursors.[571]

Riquelme is right to distinguish the allegory he is talking about from «its medieval precursors», but he is wrong to assume that Eliot is not working within this paradigm as it is clearly the case in *Dante*. In effect, deferral belongs properly to the allegorical hermeneutics of figural prophecy where every fulfilment precludes a new beginning. This hermeneutic postponement,

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he regarded the latter as the objective correlates of the former. In *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (1913) this doctrine of the 'Korrelat-gegenstand' or 'intentionales Objekt' underwent further development» (p. 262). This hypothetical link between Eliot's criticism and Husserl's philosophy reveals an interesting subtext to the objective correlative's scientific pretensions, and overshadows its logical insecurities in relation to Russell as I pointed out in Chapter 2 of this thesis, especially 'Imaginary Objects, Immediate Experience and the 'Correlative''.

570 See the discussion in chapter 2 of Russell's 'On Denoting' and Meinong's classification of objects in relation to Eliot's objective correlative and his doctoral thesis, particularly 'The Epistemologist's Theory of Knowledge (continued)'.

571 John Paul Riquelme, *Harmony of Dissonances: T. S. Eliot, Romanticism, and Imagination* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 112.

however, depends on the provisional closure of achievable fulfilments; deferral is in this sense not absolute. Allegory is the background over which one should interpret Eliot's criticism, both as a cognitive model of language and historicism, for allegory reconciles these two dimensions.[572] Where Riquelme's approach is adequate, is perhaps limited to Eliot's early rhetorical tactics of postponement in addressing metaphysics in his criticism, but which the allegorical model helps to resolve, not, that is, to perpetuate.

If Eliot rebuffs metaphysics in his early critical writings it is not as part of an explicit hermeneutics of absence, but as a struggle to content himself with what he *could* present via the medium of a scientific style. Science limits itself to presenting what is presentable in its own terms. Eliot's rhetorical development involves an expansion of what he can *present* by virtue of stretching the frontiers of his critical discourse and, by implication, that of science. It is not a matter of choice but of necessity. Eliot's preference for ontology – in the form of the ontological mysticism discussed in the Clark Lectures – is conditioned by his awareness that its recuperation can only be achieved under certain conditions, conditions which by the twentieth-century have disappeared. For Eliot we can no longer pretend to *see* like Dante saw the transcendental in the finite:

> Dante's is a *visual* imagination. It is a visual imagination in a different sense from the modern painter of a still life: it is visual in the sense that he lived in an age in which men still saw visions. It was a psychological habit, the trick of which we have forgotten, but as good as any of our own.[573]

This vision amounts to an ontology which is metaphysical but which can, nonetheless, be *seen*. It is not ineffable although it has by now been contaminated with psychology. This is the psychologism that encourages an object-less consciousness with which Eliot is concerned in the Clark lectures, and which he identifies with the romantic mysticism of St Theresa and St John. Eliot's phenomenology is one in which consciousness is still one of external objects in the tradition of Edmund Husserl. Eliot's apparent defeatist admission that Dante's ontological vision is, in the present age, beyond our reach transforms itself into a radical conformism, which actively seeks its recuperation through the alternative medium the rhetorical subversion

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[572] This point will be investigated further in 'Figures and Prophecy' of this thesis, Chapter 6.
[573] *Dante*, p. 23.

of scientific discourse. Metaphysics makes a gradual comeback into the world of the visible throughout Eliot's criticism as it is articulated both through his interest in allegory, and his attempt to upgrade rhetoric as an allegorical strategy.

The Allegory of the Poets and of the Theologians

Allegory may be commonly taken to be a mere poetic device of personification, but it is, more importantly, also a hermeneutic tool in the interpretation of the Scriptures, otherwise known as the Four Levels of Scripture which include the literal, allegorical, philosophical and anagogic. The allegory within the Four Levels is the Allegory of Poets as opposed to the Four Levels collectively referred to as the Allegory of Theologians.[574] The Allegory of the Theologians makes a point of articulating the simultaneous co-existence of the literal and the anagogic; it reconciles physics and metaphysics without altering the *reality* of the typological event under scrutiny. The facts of scripture are taken as literally true and, typologically, pre-figuring the spiritual event of the coming of Christ.[575] The Allegory of Poets, instead, is concerned with veiled moral messages, not literally true, with particular reference to the interpretation of Classical literature. It was a method of recuperating pagan works of literature for a Christian world. Dante's novelty lies in the introduction of theological allegory into a discussion of the meaning of secular poetry. It amounts to the reconciliation between the fiction of the poets and the truth of the theologians[576], which implies the exploitation of the latent poetic function – the allegorical level – within the Four Levels of Scripture. A. J. Minnis notes the impossibility of categorising Dante's allegory as either strictly theological or poetical, but as seeming,

> to be exploring the common ground which medieval literary theory was defining between poetic fiction which is in some sense true and scriptural truth which can on occasion be expressed through figures, fictions, and enigmas.[577]

This concern is basically Eliot's own and it illustrates the relationship between poetry and belief he was trying to untangle.

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[574] See Chapter IX: 'The Transformation of the Critical Tradition: Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio' in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism* (c. 1100-c.1375), A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 373-394.

[575] See Erich Auerbach, 'Figura' in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature,* Theory and History of Literature Vol. 9 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

[576] Minnis, pp. 386-387.

[577] Minnis, p. 387.

Dante is the founder of a tradition that claims truth for secular poetry, and not a mere medium for moral exemplum through literary personification. He suggests that the Allegory of the Theologians may be applied to texts other than sacred. This is a problematic shift because it involves deducing that either the Scriptures are poetry, or that poetry can claim sacred truth for itself. Minnis sees this sacred elevation of poetry exemplified by Boccaccio and Petrarch:

> But such appropriation of the theological tradition must surely reach its climax in the somewhat startling proposition that theology is poetry and poetry is theology. Poetry declares Petrarch [*Letters on Familiar Matters*, x: 4] is not inimical to theology, and he uses a Dionysian argument to prove it: «When Christ is called, now a lion, now a lamb, and again a worm, what is that if not poetic?»[578]

What Petrarch seems to be claiming is that the Bible's imagery has an arbitrary relation to its referent, in this case *Christ*, without losing its truth-value. This is because theologically this referent carries the full ontological responsibility of Being confirmed by the absolute otherness of the poetic image. It amounts to discarding the phenomenal typology of the Scriptures, and reducing its Word to a objectless image by inspiration revealed. This rejection of a referential cognitive grounding is in line, as Minnis suggests, with the negative mysticism of pseudo-Dionysus. Yet, it is the intelligibility of the Bible with its appeal to events in the world that interests Eliot, rather than the self-legitimizing ineffable poetic of the theological hermeneutics of the *via negativa*, which ultimately poeticises the Scriptures. Here lies the connection between Eliot's preference for «a philosophy which is expressed, not one which is inexpressible»[579] and the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures which does not reduce the Bible to poetry but stresses its literal concreteness.

It is the logic of the allegory of the theologians, in line with Dante's own position,[580] which leads Eliot to insist that the Bible is not literature in an unpublished address 'The Bible as Scripture and as Literature' read before the Women's Alliance at Boston King's

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578 Minnis, p. 388.

579 Lecture I [Introduction: On the Definition of Metaphysical Poetry], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 49.

580 Dante's most explicit allegiance to theological allegory can be found in his 'Epistle to Can Grande della Scala', though his authorship has never been confirmed. Dante states: «For the elucidation therefore, of what we have to say, it must be understood that the meaning of [the Divine Comedy] is not of one kind only; rather the work may be described as 'polysemous', that is, having several meanings; for the first meaning is that conveyed by what the letter signifies; the former of which is called literal, while the latter is called allegorical, or mystical», Minnis, p. 459.

Chapel in 1932 while visiting Harvard as the new Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry. It is not that the Bible has no literary relevance, but that its literary influence depends on its *not* being itself considered literature:

> But as I have explained I cannot treat the Bible as literature, or as poetry the parts of it which are regarded as poetry [. . .] so long as the Bible is read as the Bible, so long will it exert an influence upon English poetry; and when it ceases to be read as the Bible, then I do not believe we need worry about poetry, for in those days I doubt whether anything will be written which would seem in the least like poetry, to us or to our forebears.[581]

The stuff of literature is not itself a fiction but the real world of objects, among which the Word of God is the most important and thus literally true in a pseudo-empirical sense. All literature worth the name is *theological* in a cognitive sense. So that if cognition is an act of faith, then the reality of the world of objects must be dependent on the truth of faith's ultimate referent: God. This is relative to an idea which Eliot would elaborate further in *After Strange Gods* two years later:

> The Bible has had a literary influence upon English literature not because it has been considered as literature, but because it has been considered as the report of the Word of God. And the fact that men of letters now discuss it as 'literature' probably indicates the end of its 'literary' influence.[582]

One must be clear that Eliot is not insinuating that literary activity is about illustrating dogma; hence the insistence on an active separation between theology and poetry. The difficulty is to show the overlap between the two without making all literary activity dogmatic; how far, in other words, dogma is an object of cognition as faith and not simply an articulation of personal belief. This cognitive overlap is precisely the one Dante was trying to articulate by subjecting secular allegory to theological hermeneutics, without, unlike Petrarch, obscuring the difference between theology and poetry.

Eliot, it must be remembered, had a good grounding in medieval hermeneutics. Between 1909-10, he had taken English 1: 'Chaucer' and Comparative Literature 18: 'Studies on the History of Allegory', both under Allan Neilson as part of his A.M. in English literature

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581 'The Bible as Scripture and as Literature' (MS), read before the Women's Alliance at Boston's King Chapel on the 1st of December, 1932, T. S. Eliot's Family Papers at Houghton Library.

582 'After Strange Gods', *SPh*, p. 34.

at Harvard.[583] This background is evident in *Dante* (1929) where he shows a detailed knowledge of the conflicting scholarly approaches to 'allegory':

> What is important for my purpose is the fact that the allegorical method was a definite method not confined to Italy; and the fact that, apparently paradoxical, the allegorical method makes for simplicity and intelligibility. We incline to think of allegory as a tiresome cross-word puzzle [. . .] What we ignore is, in a case like Dante's, its particular effect towards lucidity of style [. . .] We have to consider the type of mind which by nature and *practice* tended to express itself in allegory: and for a competent poet, allegory means *clear visual images*.[584]

This clarification has a dual effect. It shows Eliot's awareness of allegory as a poetic model, which shuns ineffability and promotes *clear visual images*. It also widens the realm of allegory from the merely poetic to the more inclusive rhetorical mode of style, which in fact parallels the sort of writing style Eliot attempts to enact in the very place where he is encouraging it: his literary criticism. Allegory replaces the scientific model Eliot starts off with in the 1910s, but which does not fundamentally alter his early empiricism only now understood in the context of cognition and faith.

There is an interesting contemporary context to Eliot's interest in allegory. In a contribution to *The Criterion*, Benedetto Croce had written 'On the Nature of Allegory' some four years before Eliot wrote *Dante* and one year before the Clark Lectures. In this article Croce attacks the idea of allegory as a writing practice, reducing its scope to that of a superfluous hermeneutic tool. «Allegory is not a form of expression»[585], Croce warns us as he severs the links between allegory and rhetoric:

> There is no necessity to seek the tradition of allegory, properly so called, in the history of rhetoric, but in that of philosophy.[586]

This is an important distinction. By placing allegory purely within a philosophical tradition he is able to undermine its claims over poetic immediacy. Rhetoric is, on the other had, a more difficult obstacle to overcome if what Croce is looking for is to discredit allegory as a legitimate form of poetic expression. He is presenting allegory in a form which he is happy to

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[583] William Allan Neilson had completed his Ph.D. in 1912 on *The Origins and Sources of the Court of Love: A Study in Medieval Allegory*, Harvard Archives Depository.

[584] *Dante*, p. 22.

[585] Benedetto Croce, 'On the Nature of Allegory', *The Criterion*, 3, no 11 (April 1925), p. 406.

[586] Croce, 'On the Nature of Allegory', p. 407.

attack. Hence, he prefers to perpetuate the stereotype of allegory as a «*tiresome cross-word puzzle*». He continues:

> I thus defined allegory (and I believe I was the first to do so) as a practical act, a form of writing (for writing is practical), a cryptography, if the term can be applied to the uses of images spoken or figured, instead of letters and numerals [. . .] the task of deciphering allegories is altogether desperate, perpetually conjectural, and capable of the most of laying claim to a greater or lesser degree of probability.[587]

For Croce allegory is an obscure writing method which should be reduced to being an interpretative pattern ultimately external to the writing itself: «a system of hermeneutics, rather than an inventing process.»[588] Croce reduces the scope of allegory to philosophical figuration concluding that «allegory is almost always external to the poetry.»[589] Philosophy, as the inevitable hermeneutic baggage of allegory, is thus discarded and made external to the creative process; a hindrance to the immediate experience of poetry. Philosophical poetry is thus, for him, a contradiction in terms; a position which finds an echo in Valéry as attacked by Eliot in 'Dante' in *The Sacred Wood.*[590] Interestingly Edward Lobb calls for the same type of distinction in Eliot's criticism; to see it not in terms of philosophy but as rhetoric: «Criticism itself was, for Eliot, a branch of rhetoric rather than philosophy.»[591] It is as interesting as it is strange to take for granted that philosophy and rhetoric are mutually exclusive. This approach unveils a prejudice towards philosophical discourse and a hidden desire to appropriate rhetoric by poetics.

Croce's comments are in sharp contrast to Eliot who sees allegory not as a decoding system, but as a canvas on which literary expression is possible, and from which it is indistinguishable. Decoding is not what allegory is about; it does not involve cryptography, but the cognitive fulfilment of the worldview we all inevitably inhabit – a view which can happily be understood in philosophical terms. The philosophy, in the theological sense of allegory, does not get in the way because what it preaches is a cognitive act; to *see* it is to understand it though not necessarily to *believe* it; but once we see it may prove difficult *not* to believe it. Allegory

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587 Croce, 'On the Nature of Allegory', pp. 408-409.

588 Croce, 'On the Nature of Allegory', p. 409.

589 Croce, 'On the Nature of Allegory', p. 411.

590 See 'The Perception of Culture and Metaphysics' in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

591 Edward Lobb, *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition* (London: Routledge Keegan & Paul, 1981), p.158.

hence offers a common canvas where our perceptions may be collectively visualised rather than hallucinate. It encourages us to *see* as a means to understanding, at the point where *seeing* is revealed as an act of faith in the first place; where epistemology is a cognitive problem.[592] Already in the 'Dante' of *The Sacred Wood* Eliot is hinting that allegory is not reducible to a philosophy which one needs to bear in mind to understand the poem:

> Dante had the benefit of a mythology and a theology which had undergone a more complete absorption into life than those of Lucretius. It is curious that not only Dante's detractors, like the Petrarch of Landor's *Pentameron* [. . .] but some of his admirers, insist on the separation of Dante's 'poetry' and Dante's 'teaching'. Sometimes the philosophy is confused with the allegory. The philosophy is an ingredient, it is a part of Dante's world just as it is a part of life; the allegory is the scaffold on which the poem is built.[593]

Allegory is not, for Eliot, a philosophical decoding system, but an incarnating method which transfers worldviews into the public realm of the phenomenal world. As philosophy is *seen* it becomes a legitimate element of poetic expression, if by *poetic* one means an experience which is open to understanding. The cognitive grounding of philosophy on experience is equivalent to the 'literal level' of the four levels of Scripture. Allegory allows Eliot to reintroduce the philosophy he had exorcised in his early literary criticism in favour of science. Philosophy finds a place in the cognitive scaffold of allegory because it ensures the former's clarity of expression and universal appeal. Science, for Eliot, no longer holds a monopoly over the meaning of objective perception and hence is no longer the ideal model for the writing and critical practice he is seeking. It is from this allegorical point of view that Eliot's philosophical background may not be seen as an obstacle to the understanding of his criticism.[594] Lobb refuses to take Eliot's philosophical dimension seriously. He notes that he has «suggested at various points that 'ontology', and other philosophical terms were primarily metaphors for the general problem of

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592 Dante quotes Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in the 'Epistle to Can Grande della Scala': «As the philosopher says in the second book of the *Metaphysics*, as a thing is in respect of being, so it is in respect of truth'; the reason for which is, that the truth concerning a thing, which consists in the truth as in its subject, is the perfect likeness of the thing as it is», Minnis, pp. 458-459.

593 'Dante', *SW*, p. 163.

594 Seeking out this allegorical pattern in Eliot's own criticism must be the acid test of the relevance of the sort of study undertaken here. This approach may make futile the very endeavour of this thesis to use Eliot's philosophical writings as a way to understand the criticism. My only defence is that I do so only to reveal that what we are looking at is not the study of philosophy, but the development of a deliberate writing practice in Eliot's criticism. I am not asking the reader to share or sympathise with Eliot's philosophical thinking, theological beliefs or ideological principles, but to read his criticism beyond these frames, to *see* it. Although seeing it may awaken the importance of knowing about Eliot's intellectual background in the first place.

subject and object in poetry.»[595] He would rather neutralize the philosophy in Eliot's criticism by understanding it as a figure of speech and be done with it. Yet, it is not as simple as that. Eliot's use of the term 'metaphysics' in his literary criticism, as we have seen, is tested against its being a mere figure of speech before it can be taken for granted. Part of the failure of the Metaphysical poets as a critical project is Eliot's inability to justify the use of the term philosophically; since the Metaphysical poets were not themselves metaphysicians. Lobb's approach is reductive. As he would have it, Eliot's «aesthetics is comprehensible purely in literary terms without recourse to the 'minutiae' of any philosophical system.»[596] That would be true if Eliot made an absolute distinction between aesthetics and philosophy, or his rhetoric was reducible to literary readings; but that is not the case. The most one could say is that Eliot's critical rhetoric is philosophically engaged if figuratively open to literary readings.

Allegory controls the tendency of philosophical expression towards emotional ineffability privately felt. The four levels of the allegorical mode become the complete and inclusive expression of cognition's full range, from emotion and perception, to understanding and interpretation. Eliot adds:

> The structure of emotions, for which the allegory is the necessary scaffold, is complete from the most sensuous to the most intellectual and the most spiritual.[597]

Eliot's interpretation of allegory breaks down the barrier between philosophy and rhetoric as allegory becomes, not just a decoding system determined by philosophical premises, but the literary substitution of a philosophy by subjecting it to the cognitive writing practice – rhetoric – on which allegory insists. Thus the problem of distinguishing the teaching from the poetry can be overlooked, because, as belief is *seen*, it is not strictly necessary consciously to share the poet's philosophical premises to understand the poetry. Yet, since ordinary cognition is not merely an act of pure contemplation, one should expect that, as Eliot put in *Dante* (1929), «understanding must terminate in belief». Belief thus becomes dissociated from the mere expression of a doctrine, but becomes, in the widest sense of the word, that necessary element

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595 Lobb, p 158.
596 Lobb, p. 159.
597 'Dante', *SW*, p. 169.

in ordinary cognition which supplements that ever receding semantic – or experiential – immediacy which must be the goal of all understanding:

> It is possible, and sometimes necessary, to argue that full understanding must identify itself with full belief. A good deal, it thus turns out, hangs on the meaning, if any, for this short word *full*.[598]

The ambiguity of this statement lies in the impossibility of determining what understanding amounts to. That we *understand* by partaking in the act of belief which makes others understand does not necessarily tells us *how much* we end up understanding or whether we understand exactly in the same way. Belief, in this sense, already amounts to a critical self-consciousness which makes its *fullness* out of reach and its vision not merely immediate.

Croce's interpretation of allegory parallels Petrarch's criticism of Dante: that it involves a philosophical backdrop without which it is impossible to understand the poem; that one must, then, separate the poetry from the teaching, the rhetoric from the philosophy. Croce does this by first dissociating rhetoric from allegory so that he can isolate allegory as discardable philosophic paraphernalia, so that paradoxically poetry can supplant philosophy by overlooking the former's dependency on thought systems. For Croce poetry must aim for the sort of cognitive immediacy which can only be obstructed by having to bear philosophy in mind. This is the sort of cognitive immediacy which Eliot cannot allow for, particularly when it involves the elevation of the poetic vision to realms unattainable in ordinary cognition. In fact, Croce's views parallel those of Petrarch and Boccaccio, to equate theological with poetic revelation as I noted above. This is a battle about the status of poetry, which becomes a jostling for position within the Trivium (Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric) and particularly against its millstone, rhetoric.[599] It translates into an upgrading of poetry within the hierarchy of knowledge. The poetics of revelation thus attempts to supplant the mediated artificiality of rhetoric.

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[598] *Dante*, p. 58.

[599] See Minnis, 'Placing the Poetics: Hermann the German; An Anonymous Question on the Nature of Poetry', pp. 277-281. The discussion relates to the placing of poetry within the trivium and, more specifically, about its subordination, along rhetoric, to logic.

Eliot emphasizes all the aspects of allegory Croce leaves out: the phenomenal typology of the Allegory of the Theologians, the rhetoric and the philosophy. So much so that, shortly after Croce's article, in the Clark lectures Eliot insists that:

> The change of style from provençal to early Italian is the change from the lyrical to the philosophical; the change from Elizabethan to Jacobean is the change from lyrical to rhetorical. I am using the term 'rhetorical' as exactly as I can, and, be it well noted, without any implication whatever of eulogy or defamation.[600]

In this passage Eliot is recalling '«Rhetoric» and Poetic Drama' (first published as a review of Edmond Rostand's *Le Vol de la Marseillaise*, 'Whether Rostand had Something About Him', *Athenaeum*, 4656 (July 25, 1919), 665-6, and later included with revisions in *The Sacred Wood*). Here Eliot sees rhetoric as a philosophical development, and thus destroys Croce's alleged incompatibility between the two. Furthermore, this rhetoric becomes the meeting point between literature and philosophy. This is how Eliot puts it:

> Some years ago, I wrote a short note on 'rhetoric' which was included in my volume *The Sacred Wood*, which in the main I still approve. But it was written in a different context than this, and I was thinking chiefly of so-called 'dramatic' rhetoric. But I said even then, that I could not admit any antithesis between the 'rhetorical' and the 'conversational'. Rhetoric may be merely a development of conversation: Cicero *talked* his discourses; the actors of the Elizabethan dramatists shouted them. Any literary mode is a development out of speech; sometimes it gets too far away from speech: in philosophy, Professor Husserl or Professor Cohen is a good deal farther away from speech, it seems to me, than Berkeley or Leibnitz or even Kant; Adam Smith is a good deal nearer to the conversational style than most of our modern economists.[601]

Eliot's short note on rhetoric is, of course, ''»Rhetoric' and Poetic Drama', which now becomes the basis for a radical development of his original poetic theory in *The Sacred Wood.* That «any literary mode is a development of speech» places poetry automatically within the realm of rhetoric, in so far as «they all have the same relation to conversation.»[602] In Metaphysical poetry, rhetoric acts as a substitute for the allegorical development of Dante; the meeting point between philosophy and literature. This is a substitution which Eliot is now prepared to accept and generalise about. It contrasts with the melancholic frustration with philosophical discourse we find in Eliot's letter to Norbert Wiener on the 6th of January 1915:

> For *me*, as for Santayana, philosophy is chiefly literary criticism and conversation about life; and you have the logic, which seems to me of great value.[603]

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600 The Clark Lectures, Lecture IV [The Conceit in Donne], *VMP*, pp. 128-129.

601 The Clark Lectures, Lecture IV [The Conceit in Donne], *VMP*, p. 129.

602 The Clark Lectures, Lecture IV [The Conceit in Donne], *VMP*, p. 130.

603 'To Robert Wiener, 6 January, 1915], *Letters*, p. 81.

Eliot was at the time mourning the end of philosophy, and half-heartedly promoting its replacement with logic, which becomes the stylistic premise of his early criticism. In fact, in those early days Eliot's consolation is logic – the queen of the Trivium – but which also sees the subliminal upgrading of rhetoric as a viable stylistic model. The reality is that Eliot's literary criticism gradually parts company with logic as the latter is appropriated by rhetoric.[604] Poetics follows a similar fate at the beginning of Eliot's literary career, as the formalism of the image sheds the logical stylistic pretensions of Symbolism. It is gradually de-idealised, as his dabbling with logic deliberately fail to sustain the absoluteness of his early scientific criticism which he compensates for with force of argument which must ultimately be rhetorical – literary criticism and conversation about life. This process delivers the practical recuperation of philosophy as a form of expression which in literature becomes a shift from the poetics of lyricism to rhetoric. But how does allegory help us to understand this rhetorical shift apart from underscoring its mediating role between philosophy and literature?

Rhetoric and the Sound of the Sense of the Word

In the Clark Lectures, rhetoric (conversation or literary criticism) is concretely upgraded; included, that is, in the Four Senses of allegorical interpretation as an aspect of its cognitive phenomenology of language. This is something Eliot vaguely referred to in '«Rhetoric» and Poetic Drama' some years earlier. In this essay he is attempting to find a place for rhetoric in literary criticism: «Let us avoid the assumption that rhetoric is a vice of manner, and endeavour to find a rhetoric of substance also, which is right because it issues from what it has to express.»[605] Yet in this earlier essay Eliot is unable to provide a direct definition of the sort of rhetoric he is promoting or where it fits in literary criticism. His suggestion that it is *right* because it is of *substance*, leaves us wondering whether it is meant in the Aristotelian sense. This interpretation would fit quite nicely with the allegorical context of Dante where I am trying to place Eliot's reinterpretation of rhetoric. He adds:

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604 See '*Vers Libre* and the Problem with Philosophy', Chapter 1.

605 '«Rhetoric» and Poetic Drama', *SW*, p. 79.

> We may apply the term 'rhetoric' to the type of dramatic speech which I have instanced, and then we must admit that it covers good as well as bad. Or we may choose to except this type of speech from rhetoric.[606]

The dramatic speech Eliot has been talking about is blank verse which Eliot is undecided whether to consider rhetorical. This ambivalence is then rhetorically tilted by Eliot's final comment: «We cannot allow [rhetoric] to cover all bad writing». This is a rhetoric which manipulates the logic of double negatives to create an impression of *definite* ambiguity. The consideration that, though rhetoric may imply bad writing, not all bad writing is rhetorical, is exploited logically to imply that not all rhetoric is bad writing. Eliot is evoking rhetoric as a legitimate mode of expression without fully embracing it in the essay; perhaps because Eliot refuses to admit that he is being rhetorical but logical. But by the time Eliot writes the Clark Lectures Eliot is prepared to go further. Rhetoric is implicitly shown to partake of allegorical characteristics. For him the switch from Elizabethan lyricism to Jacobean rhetoric is one which re-captures the objects of meaning in an effort that parallels the sensual (or should we say *substantial*) allegory of the poetry of Dante, only that the visual imagination of allegory is now mediated by sound; a sound however that sheds the musical implications of the lyric:

> It is a variation of focus: the focus is shifted, even if ever so little, from sound, to sense; from the sound of the word to the sound of the sense of the word, if you like; the sense of the sound or the sound of the sense; to the consciousness of the meaning of the word and a pleasure in that sound having that meaning.[607]

The music of lyricism is altered sensually to invoke the meaning of the word rather than the subjecting the word to a mere musical sound-pattern. Eliot sees this switch as a rhetorical development which rescues the phenomenality of language from mere phonetics, grounding it instead in the thought patterns of speech; it reconciles thought and feeling.

Yet by this stage, the language of thought and feeling begins to run thin, just as Eliot's admiration of Donne comes to an end. It does, because, in the end, he cannot find a definition for metaphysical poetry. Eliot's interest in Crashaw is interesting in this sense. In the Clark Lectures Crashaw appears as the other half of the metaphysical dialectic: where Donne is thought, Crashaw is feeling. It parallels Eliot's earlier efforts to complete the metaphysical historicism arround the 'dissociation of sensibility' between Donne and Marvell: where the

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606 '«Rhetoric» and Poetic Drama', *SW*, pp. 84-85.

607 Lecture IV [The Conceit in Donne], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 130.

former's anticipation to it is understood in terms of Marvell's later arrival and questionable yet potential metaphysicality. Yet, Donne can never quite fulfil the role of exemplary Metaphysical poet, but must always be offered a compensatory point of reference.[608] Crashaw, however, fares better than Marvell; he even threatens to take over Donne's role in Eliot's criticism insofar as he can develop his rhetorical approach and change of terminology better with Donne and leave the ambiguous historicism of the 'dissociation' behind.

Even if Eliot only devotes one of the Clark Lectures to Crashaw, while Donne occupies four of the total eight, it is the former which two years later champions the critical turn towards rhetoric. In 'A Note on Richard Crashaw' (first published as 'The Poems English, Latin and Greek of Richard Crashaw', *Dial*, lxxxiv. 3 (March 1928), pp. 246-50, and later include in *For Lancelot Andrewes*) Eliot objects to the drawing of similarities between Crashaw's 'The Weeper' and Shelley's 'The Skylark'. The interest of the objection lies in the words he uses to express it: «I doubt whether the sound of two poems can be very similar, when the sense is entirely different». He continues referring to 'The Skylark': «For the first time perhaps in verse of such eminence, sound exists without sense.»[609] Crashaw must then be considered the poetic hinge on which Eliot's criticism turns at the time of his conversion to Anglicanism, the rhetorical point in which the metaphysical period in his criticism comes to an end, and where the allegorical begins. In 'A Note on Richard Crashaw', the latency of Dante's allegory in the interaction between sound and sense is made explicit just as Eliot qualifies the religious factor in this critical transition:

> I call Crashaw a 'devotional' poet, because the word 'religious' is so abused [. . .] Devotional poetry is religious poetry which falls within an exact faith, and has precise objects for contemplation.[610]

Crashaw becomes a sort of minor Dante for Eliot. He is now understood in terms closer to the ones he uses to refer to the Italian poet in the Clark Lectures, where he notes: «In Dante, as I have said again and again, you get a system of thought and feeling; every part of the system felt

608 «In Donne you get a sequence of thoughts which are felt; in Crashaw you might say, by slightly straining an antithesis, that you have a sequence of feelings which are thought. In neither do you find a perfect balance», Lecture VI [Crashaw], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 183.

609 'A Note on Richard Crashaw', *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), pp. 95 & 96.

610 'A Note on Richard Crashaw', p. 97.

and thought in its place, and the whole system felt and thought.»[611] In 1928 Crashaw is praised in these very terms, if only within a narrower cultural spectrum, that of «an exact faith» which, by implication may not be as universal as the Trecento's. The similitude, and the difference, is perhaps best expressed by Eliot much later in 'What Dante Means to Me', a talk given at the Italian Institute, London, on July 4th, 1950:

> We have for instance in English literature great religious poets, but they are, by comparison with Dante, *specialists*. That is all they can do. And Dante, because he could do everything else, is for that reason the greatest 'religious' poet, though to call him a 'religious poet' would be to abate his universality.[612]

In any case, the patchwork of thought and feeling that is the conceit – the poetic salvaging technique of shoring fragments against one's ruins, if you like -, is dropped as the defining point of Crashaw. The alternative is a rhetorical account which uses, instead, the terms of *the sense of the sound* to take it closer to the allegorical mode of Dante, which finds a better, if imperfect, expression in the adjectives 'devotional' or 'religious'. Thus Crashaw becomes a useful point of reference in Eliot's own poetic struggle – and, after his conversion in 1927, he must have felt 'devotional' poetry was a real possibility for himself. 'Devotional' poetry offers the possibility of alleviating the anxiety of influence Eliot feels about the impossibility of overcoming the great poetic masters, other than fashioning inferior copies or stealing lines from them.

This poetic resignation was the organising principle of *The Waste Land* in 1922, precisely where Eliot offers, among others, a fragment from Dante's Inferno:

> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled.[613]

These lines refer to Cantos III (lines 55-7: «si lunga tratta/di gente, ch'io non avrei mai creduto,/ que morte tanta n'avesse disfatta») and IV (lines 25-7: «Quivi, secondo che per ascoltare,/non avea pianto, ma' che di sospiri,/ che l'aura eterna facevan tremare»). Yet the

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611 Lecture VI [Crashaw], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, pp. 182-3.

612 T. S. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 134.

613 'The Waste Land', T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), ll. 63-64, p. 65. In 'What Dante Means to Me', Eliot notes that after *The Waste Land* he tried to use Dante again, «but the method is different: here I was debarred from quoting or adapting at length – I borrowed and adapted only a few phrases – because I was imitating», p. 128.

resignation goes deeper. Helen Gardner notes that *The Waste Land* represents the culmination of a period of metrical virtuosity,

> whose basic measure is the heroic line, which it handles in almost every possible way. One could indeed give a demonstration of the varied music of which this line is capable from *The Waste Land* alone, giving parallels from the work of the most astonishingly diverse poets. We hear the voice of the Jacobean dramatists again in the voice of the thunder at the end. The Shakespearean echoes, apart from direct adaptation are everywhere.[614]

The metrical form, is for Gardner, deeply entangled with Eliot's dependence on other poets to articulate his poetry. But there is a change from 1927 which culminates in *Ash Wednesday*:

> From now on he will try to speak in his own voice, which will express himself with all his limitations, and not try to escape those limitations by imitating other poets. The heroic line is a hindrance in this attempt, because it has so long and glorious history that when it is used as the metre of a long poem it is almost impossible not to echo one or other of its great masters.[615]

The crucial poems of this transition are for Helen Gardner the *Ariel Poems*, which where written simultaneously with the composition of *Ash Wednesday* (1930). The urgency of this transition is dramatically evidenced by Eliot himself who noted in *The New York Times* on the 29th November, 1953: «I thought my poetry was over after 'The Hollow Men' [. . .] writing the Ariel poems released the stream and led directly to *Ash Wednesday*.» Gardner goes further, she suggests that «'Marina' is the bridge between *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*.»[616] These poems with their themes of crisis, death and rebirth allegorize Eliot's poetic regeneration, and place him firmly in a devotional tradition which sheds literary intertextuality, subjugation to the great masters and the Tradition as the only strategy for individual poetic expression. He seeks conversational and personal intimacy with the reader as the poetic medium, but with its point of reference firmly set in the universal, even if this universality has to narrow itself to Christian tradition.

'The Journey of the Magi' and 'A Song for Simeon' are explicitly biblical, presenting the birth of Jesus mediated through the personal experience of the collective voice of

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614 Helen Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), p. 19. Gardner is thinking of Eliot's 'What Dante Means to Me', where he talks about the greater influence of minor poets, rather than great masters, in his earlier poetry, noting that «the latter are to exalted and too remote. They are like distant ancestors who have almost been deified; whereas the smaller poet, who has directed one's first steps, is more like an admired elder brother», p. 126.

615 Gardner, p. 20.

616 Gardner, p. 126.

the Magi, on their trip to Bethlehem, and that of Simeon, an old Jew who must witness the birth of Jesus before he dies. Yet Eliot's turn can not be reduced to the adjective 'religious', just as he warns us not to fall into the same mistake with Crashaw; it is, more importantly, a new mode of expression. It seeks to combine the personal and the universal through images which become significant because they are spoken and experienced by an individual, and not only because of the reified symbolic significance of Christianity or Symbolism on its own:

> Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
> Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation,
> With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
> And three trees on the low sky.
> An old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
> Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
> Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
> And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
> But there was no information, and so we continued
> And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
> Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.[617]

The significance of this passage is that, though personal, it is not intentional. Its strong religious symbolism refuses to be self-conscious in that it initially places no demands on the reader to apprehended its objects as other than ordinary everyday experiences. Here the speaker narrates events present to him, which as yet have no religious or personal significance, firstly, because the former interpretation is not available to the world – which is yet to see the development of Christianity – and, secondly, because he has had not time to reflect on his own experience. There is a sense that they are unknowingly making history. They are seeing the Old Testament being fulfilled by the New, but they only notice the smell of vegetation, an old horse, taverns, men betting at cards, three trees: «But there was no information, and so we continued». We feel like children watching a 'Punch and Judy' show, wanting to cry «behind you!», yet still wandering that in their ignorance there might be a knowledge that escapes us. It is the knowledge of being there, of experience, transmitted through a conversational narrative which it is still looking for the right words to express itself, or to pass judgement: «Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.» It is the opposite of religious didacticism, but which finds its sources in the preaching of Lancelot Andrewes and the Bible, but also in the personal experience of the poetic personae and the poet. The synthesis of the personal and the universal,

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617 T. S. Eliot, 'The Journey of the Magi', *Collected Poems, 1909-1962*, ll. 21-31, pp. 109-110.

the actual and the symbolic affords Eliot a new poetic voice, but which finds its possibility in his critical writings and can be best understood thorough the terms allegory and rhetoric there found. In the period between 1928 and 1930, Eliot's criticism and the *Ariel Poems* follow and intimate parallelism: 'The Journey of the Magi' and 'A song for Simeon' closely precede *For Lancelot Andrewes*, *Dante* appears almost simultaneously with 'Animula', (itself an interesting allegorical poem), and *Anabasis: A Poem of St.-J. Perse* with 'Marina'. The last of the *Ariel Poems*, 'The Cultivation of Christmas Trees', offers an exegesis of these poems by suggesting to the reader how to understand their images and narrative. Essentially Eliot is encouraging the childish innocence of the Magi as a poetic premise:

> - which is not that of the child
> For whom the candle is a star, and the gilded angel
> Spreading its wings at the summit of the tree
> Is not only a decoration but an angel.[618]

Here the actual personal and universal mingle in what must be seen as an allegorical moment, and about which Eliot wants to tell us explicitly, if only rhetorically. The new critical terminology finds an equivalent release in the poetry, and this newly found strength translates into an increasing confidence to take on the great masters; to shrug off Milton and to reach out to Dante.

Eliot's attack on Milton is interesting because it helps to define the scope and limits of rhetoric as understood in his criticism. Rhetoric falls short of the allegorical vision of Dante, yet it implies a partial recovery of the former's cognitive mode which avoids ineffability and abstraction, or, what Eliot later calls in 'Milton I', the Auditory Imagination. For Eliot, Milton's blindness becomes a literal visual absence in the poetry which makes evident an overall cognitive deficiency in the poet:

> I do not mean that to go blind in the middle life is itself enough to undermine the whole nature of the man's poetry [. . .] Had Milton been a man of very keen senses – I mean of *all* five senses – his blindness would not have mattered much.[619]

Milton's blindness does not necessarily amount to a cognitive deficiency had not he been cognitively impaired before going blind. This position remains coherent with the dissociation of

618 T. S. Eliot, 'The Cultivation of Christmas Trees', *Collected Poems, 1909-1962*, ll. 5-8, p. 117.

619 'Milton I', *SPh*, p. 124.

perception and cognition in Bradley's theory of immediate experience, also implied in the 'dissociation of sensibility' between feeling and thought. Cognition is not equivalent to perception.[620] Thus Eliot's stress on visuality in Dante's allegory must be revised not to imply merely seeing with one's eyes, but rather understood as a cognitive vision in the context of mystical experience.

Though the appearance of rhetoric is symptomatic of a dissociated relation between cognition and perception, it also offers a potential to redress the balance. This is essentially the same problem of the Dissociation of Sensibility and the Metaphysical Poets, which in the Clark Lectures seeks new terms of definition besides *wit* or the *conceit*. It seeks a more open application not reducible to the 17th-century alone. On the one hand Eliot links Milton's cognitive deficiency with rhetoric, that «the result with Milton is, in one sense of the word, *rhetoric*» But in which sense exactly? Eliot still insists that «the term is not intended to be derogatory»[621]. On the one hand rhetoric represents a cognitive deficiency which stresses sound at the expense of meaning – i.e. listening to the sound of one's voice -, on the other, it represents the phenomenal dimension of a meaning rooted in thought that comes into being through speech. In the Clark Lectures Eliot is interested in rhetoric in this last sense, where sound is recaptured by meaning, perception subsumed into cognition. Sound is fine as long as it is *the sound of the sense of the word*; the sound of the word is cognitively experienced as *sense* when it is governed by thought patterns recreated by a conversational style. In Milton, instead, «the syntax is determined by the musical significance, by the auditory imagination, rather than by the attempt to follow actual speech or thought.»[622] The result is, Eliot adds,

> at the expense of the visual and tactile, so that the inner meaning is separated from the surface, and tends to become something occult, or at least without effect upon the reader until fully understood.[623]

The result is psychological or, what is the same for Eliot, emotionally ineffable and occult. Meaning refuses to be cognitively and literally available. Instead the word legitimises itself by adopting a self-referential sensual existence which fails to point to the world of meaningful

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620 See Chapter 2, specially 'Imaginary Objects, Immediate Experience and the 'Correlative''.

621 'Milton I', *SPh*, p. 128.

622 'Milton I', *SPh*, p. 128.

623 'Milton I', *SPh*, p. 129.

objects. It is as if, for Eliot, Milton's blindness exacerbates his need to recreate a sensual experience in the sound of words at the expense of the *whole* cognitive experience of the world he can no longer see. Milton confuses perception and cognition, exalts the senses at the expense of the *vision*; yet he is in *one sense of the word* rhetorical, and to this extent Eliot embraces Milton's problem as our own. Just as the Metaphysical poets are in one sense of the word *dissociated*, even if to a greater or lesser extent they represent a redemptive poetic development. Milton is perhaps more on the side of the problem than of the solution.

Eliot sees the possibility of recovering the allegorical function through an exploitation of rhetoric, and thus of recovering a coherent sensibility by renewing the proper link between cognition and perception. Milton's impaired *vision* is symptomatic of an increasingly self-conscious cognition as opposed to Dante who «is visual in the sense that he lived in an age in which men still saw visions [. . .] the trick of which we have forgotten.»[624] What Eliot is pointing out is that increasing self-consciousness implies a deficiency in cognitive faith rather than impairment of vision. Rhetoric, as well as criticism[625], appears when philosophical belief becomes self-conscious and one cannot simply *see* without *reflection*. Yet rhetoric can be made to perform the very phenomenal function it undermines. In fact, the sort of seventeenth-century rhetoric Eliot defended in '«Rhetoric» and Poetic Drama' achieves a phenomenological dimension through self-consciousness, thus making a virtue out of a vice:

> The really fine rhetoric in Shakespeare occurs in situations where the character in the play *sees himself* in a dramatic light.[626]

This is a poetry which is increasingly more involved in rhetoric than lyricism; in other words, a rhetorical poetics, which Eliot sees as partaking of the phenomenological dimension of allegory: a rhetoric which still *sees* despite self-consciousness; which sees even if it is only to see itself. Thus rhetoric is, however precariously, shown to retain the residue of a phenomenal grounding that can be exploited.

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624 *Dante*, p. 23.

625 The critical function «seems to be the time when poetry ceases to be the expression of the mind of a whole people», *TUPUC*, p. 22.

626 «Rhetoric» and Poetic Drama', *SW*, p. 81.

For Eliot allegory is not a poetic figure, and he makes this clear by distinguishing between allegory and metaphor. This is how he describes the allegorical style of Richard of St Victor's *De Gratia Contemplationis* (Book I, Chapter III) in the Clark Lectures:

> Richard is very sparing of tropes and figures; there is only the main allegory running through the treatise, the comparison of the stages of the mind to the parts of the ark of the covenant – an allegory which causes no confusion. It is prose which seems to me to satisfy the primary demands of writing, that is, to write what you think in the words in which you think it, adding no embellishment; to avoid metaphors and figures of speech, and to keep your emotions out of it.[627]

To write what one thinks in the way one thinks it is the allegorical imperative of all *good* rhetoric. For Eliot the literal emphasis of the real object or event in scriptural allegory parallels the importance of rooting the conversational style of rhetoric in the literal experience of thinking. Rhetorical expression can evoke the cognitive experience of the thought, just as Dante's visual allegory parallels the sensory immediacy of the image. This strategy encourages the concrete articulation of emotion instead of the falsification of the emotion through the use of figures and tropes. In *Dante* Eliot adds:

> Dante's attempt is to makes us see what he saw. He therefore employs very simple language and very few metaphors, for allegory and metaphor do not get on well together.[628]

Metaphor and allegory do not get on well together because they stress different aspects of cognition. Metaphor's claims on likeness demands an understanding of meaning external to the experience of the image it evokes. Dante's genius is to makes us see what he saw, and this *seeing* contains a meaning internal to its cognitive experience though not reducible to its visual content. Cognitively speaking seeing allegorically is already to see more; it is seeing a meaning as an experience.

This difficult relation between perception and cognition is perhaps latent in Ezra Pound's 'A Retrospect' (1918) where he notes:

> I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man use 'symbols' he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that *a* sense, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom for instance, a hawk is a hawk.[629]

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[627] Lecture II [Donne and the *Trecento*], The Clark Lectures, *VMP*, p. 103.

[628] *Dante*, pp. 23-24.

[629] Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect' (1918) in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 373-377 (p. 377).

There is something akin to allegory in Pound's advice on the use of symbol; an awareness that the ideal content is ultimately contained in the real meaning. Yet allegory amounts for Eliot to something more complex than Pound's views on language. For Eliot allegory is informed with the difficulty of assuming a correlation between the real and the ideal. The relationship between real and ideal is asymmetrical. The ambiguity lies in the fact that a real object may be a sign for an idea, yet an idea may not be said to be a sign of a particular reality. This is problematic because it defies the possibility of any easy correlation between the real and the ideal. This is how Eliot put it in his doctoral thesis:

> A flower may become the sign or symbol of an emotion; the fox is the symbol of cunning [. . .] Now does an idea refer to reality as a fox refers to cunning? The quality to which the fox or the flower refers is something known or knowable otherwise than through the fox or the flower [. . .] A flower may be the sign of an idea, but how can an idea be a *sign* of a reality? Such a view would surely lead us to a representational theory of knowledge.[630]

The real and the ideal are connected through a sign which cannot claim any legitimate allegiance with either; their relation is not one of identity.[631] The idea may be known by means other than the chosen sign, and a real object may equally be misunderstood as a sign for an idea to which it has no absolute claim. Thus Eliot struggles in his doctoral thesis to articulate the arbitrariness as a contiguity. He can only come to a vague conclusion: «The idea certainly has a sort of existence apart from the reality to which it refers, but the apartness is of a special sort and may be easily misunderstood.»[632] The apartness does not, for Eliot, imply arbitrariness. Thus, though he encourages a style rooted in the phenomenological dimension of cognitive experience, Eliot is not promoting a representational theory of knowledge.

Allegory, Eliot goes on to say, is figurative in respect to the world, but it is literal to itself. This is the subtext of:

> But as the whole poem of Dante is, if you like, one vast metaphor, there is hardly any place for metaphor in the detail of it.[633]

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[630] *KE*, p. 48.

[631] «A sign has its existence besides its content, and it is just this separate existence – the fact that the sign might be misrepresented or simply not recognized as a sign at all, which makes it a sign and not an identity», *KE*, p. 48.

[632] *KE*, p. 48.

[633] *Dante*, p. 25.

This vastness makes the significance of the metaphor not one of identity or likeness, but stresses its allegorical self-sufficiency; it makes it a world unto itself. Allegory's visuality is not representational but cognitive. The apartness of the real and the ideal is only mediated by their own *literal* demands on ourselves.[634] Literalness to themselves is the point of contiguity between each other, which falls short of mutual likeness in the representational sense.[635] Eliot imports this strategy into his criticism as a means to rescue rhetoric from semantic obscurity. Thus, as we write the way we think, the closer one gets to what one is thinking of without seeking a phonetic correlation between what we mean and how we say what we mean; it is, rather, how we experience what we mean as we think about it. Just as allegory's visuality is not merely metaphoric, rhetoric's speech act is not merely onomatopoeic. Speech – as sound – is naturally figurative in so far as it is not the object world itself, yet it incarnates itself *in* the world as the sound becomes a *meaningful* object which, once created, provokes an experience which is not merely auditory; not, that is, the sound of the word but *the sound of the sense of the word.* (The sound here very much not meaning music.) This phenomenology of language stresses the literalness of figurative language to itself, as it incarnates the *literalness* – not the identity – of the object world it is uttering. Thus, without saying that all language is simply figurative, Eliot attempts to reconcile this (ideal) figurative aspect of language with the objectifying inertia of cognition which must always assume a (real) literal world.

In his doctoral thesis Eliot was already indicating that the literal and the figurative are not absolutely different aspects of linguistic denotation:

> We are accustomed to handle and use [ordinary objects] by symbols which merely denote them; we forget that their reality is as much in their meaning as in their denotation, and we take it for granted that they simply are. Nor is this belief an error.[636]

Eliot is not saying that taking for granted that the objects denoted by language *merely are* is wrong, because assuming a literal referent in the world is a natural cognitive inference. Yet we

634 Minnis refers to the development of this twofold literal sense in his exposition of the allegorical developments of Scholasticism. See Minnis, 'Scriptural science and signification: From *Alexander's Sum of Theology* to Nicholas Lyre', specially pp. 203-209.

635 Of course the alternative resolution is that of making their relation absolute by relying on absolute unlikeness as in the hermeneutics of the *via negativa.*

636 *KE*, p. 131.

must not forget that the reality of the object depends for its existence on its denotation; a denotation which itself maintains a degree of autonomy from that which it denotes. This is not to say that reality is purely figurative, in so far as, inversely, figuration ultimately aims to mimic a world whose literalness it is trying to encompass to become meaningful. In the end denotations hold a degree of reality which is not merely dependent on their denoting a thing because the denotation is already *something*. This is the necessary apartness which paradoxically glues the real and the ideal. Eliot had touched on this problem when he considered the extent to which unreal objects partake of the status of real objects.[637] Figures, like unreal objects, may be taken as literal to themselves in the autonomy of their denotation. Eliot had concluded that while logic is unable to make theoretical sense of this type of objects, it presents no contradiction for metaphysical discourse – here rhetoric: «For metaphysics, [unreal objects] cannot be denied practical reality without being admitted to some more attenuated but (if you like) equally real reality.»[638]

The link between metaphysics and rhetoric is implicit in Hugh Kenner's repudiation of the metaphysics implied in logocentrism in 'The Possum in the Cave':

> Metaphysics might then be redefined from the point of view of the trivium, as an inevitable rhetorical or tropological effect. It would not be the cause but a phantom generated within the house of language by the play of language.[639]

Eliot is actively dealing with this unshakeable metaphysical implied in rhetoric by including metaphysics within the framework of ordinary cognition. For him this translation is made apparent in allegory. His early scientific discourse and proposal «to halt at the frontier of Metaphysics»[640] fails to leave metaphysics behind by conceding to its presence just as it is denied, in what is a concession to Bradley's negative reasoning. This negative reasoning becomes properly positive through a renewed rhetoric contextualized in the allegorical model. Allegory offers a model in which to articulate the degree of reality of unreal objects or referent-less denotations, by contextualising existence in cognition rather than perception. It is not as

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637 See 'Contradictions and Unreal Objects' in Chapter 2.

638 *KE*, p. 129.

639 Hugh Kenner, 'The Possum in the Cave' in *Allegory and Representation*, Stephen J. Greenblatt ed. (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1981), 128-144 (p. 142).

640 *SW*, p. 59

simple as Kenner's claim: «Not the metaphysical then but the physical seems worth affirming.»[641] For Eliot this dualism is useless. The real is not physical as such, it is literal. It is in this literalness that ideal (metaphysical) and the real (physical) can be reconciled.

Figures and Prophecy

A central problem of allegorical approaches to scriptural typology is in determining the extent to which figuration is literal to itself paralleling the literalness of the object world. This overlap amounts to admitting that one cannot make a complete distinction between the allegory of the Poets – with its stress on metaphor – and that of the Theologians – with its concern with the spiritual interpretations of the literal. The admission of the interaction between poetic allegory and scriptural exegesis delivers the overall attempt not to stress the literal at the expense of interpretation and vice versa. The allegory of the Poets, A. J. Minnis argues, was gradually imported into the interpretation of scripture as «an attack on those theologians who had well-nigh suffocated the literal sense with their excessive proliferation of mystical interpretations.»[642] This suffocation of the literal sense was combated with a strategy which involved making a distinction between the human *auctores* of scripture and the divine *auctor*. This translated into the Augustinian distinction between «words which signify and things which signify.»[643] It involves the radical admission that the Scriptures are not the unadulterated Word of God, but can be, in various degrees, mediated by earthly authors. But, to what extent is the authorial intention of the earthly author relevant to the divine meaning of scripture? Minnis suggests that this problem was dealt with via the typological – or prophetic – exegesis of the Scriptures. He puts it thus:

> But to what extent did the authors of words know what the author of things was doing? This matter came to a head in the late medieval analysis of prophecy: did the prophets speak with any knowledge of the significance of what they were saying. In marked contrast with earlier attitudes which tended to regard prophets and inspired writers as the passive mouthpieces for mysterious divine messages, several thirteenth-century theologians spoke up on behalf of the human beings whom God had selected.[644]

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[641] Hugh Kenner, 'The Possum in the Cave', p. 143.

[642] Minnis, p. 204.

[643] Minnis, p. 203.

[644] Minnis, p. 205.

The relation of the figurative meaning of language to the divine meaning of things is a blueprint for the phenomenal relation of language to the world and its acquisition of meaning. The question is how the figures of the human author can be liberalised to correlate in phenomenal status to the divine meaning: how the arbitrariness of the human choice of figures is connected to the definiteness of the divine meaning. In Eliot this concern about the boundaries between factuality and allegory is present in his interpretation of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, where he states that: «It appears likely, to anyone who reads the *Vita Nuova* without prejudice, that it is a mixture of biography and allegory.»[645] The prejudice Eliot is referring to is the view of allegory as an obscure and mystically occult mode of literary expression. The biographical element refers to human agency and the rooting of allegorical meaning in the world of experience even as it acquires further meanings.

In his essay 'Figura', Erich Auerbach notices a hermeneutic turn away from strict symbolic interpretations of the Scriptures. He feels this turn is illustrated by the practices of phenomenal prophecy of the Old and New Testament in the tradition of St Augustine, St Paul or Tertullian:

> The aim of this sort of interpretation was to show that the persons and events of the Old Testament were prefigurations of the New Testament and its history of salvation. Here it should be noted that Tertullian expressly denied that the literal and historical validity of the Old Testament was diminished by the figural interpretation. He was definitely hostile to spiritualism and refused to consider the Old Testament as *mere allegory* [. . .]The prophetic figure, he believed, is a concrete historical fact, and it is fulfilled by concrete historical facts.[646]

Auerbach argues that the phenomenal prophecy of the Bible encouraged a practice of «figural interpretation», which he distinguishes from «mere allegory» or what we have been referring to as the Allegory of the Poets. In figural interpretation events relate to each other in time, and historically in terms of a prefiguring event and its fulfilment. The model for such an interpretation of the Scriptures lies in the prophecy and birth of Christ: «Figural meaning in the strict sense, in the Old Testament is the prefiguration of the coming of Christ.»[647] Auerbach's suspicion of the term *allegory* is due to its symbolic implications; the symbolic tendency to

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645 *Dante*, p. 62.

646 Auerbach, 'Figura', p. 30.

647 Auerbach, 'Figura', p. 42.

spiritualize the facticity of the prefiguring event. This is mainly why Auerbach goes to great lengths to substitute the term 'allegory' for 'figura'. He is consciously combating prejudices against allegory. His reference to «mere allegory» shows a defensive awareness of anti-allegorical prejudice, just as it is attempting to resurrect its proper application. In the end figural prophecy belongs to the allegorical exegesis of the Scriptures. Hence Auerbach has to add:

> Since in figural interpretation one thing stands for another [. . .] figural interpretation is 'allegorical' in the widest sense. But it differs from most of the allegorical forms known to us by both the historicity of the sign and what it signifies.[648]

He offers 'figura' as a means of reactivating the theological tradition behind the term allegory; a tradition which aims «to preserve the full historicity of the Scriptures along with the deeper meaning.»[649] In the Clark Lectures, Eliot shows this same concern about allegorical readings of Dante's *Vita Nuova*:

> When we read the book in question, we may receive the impression that the *Vita Nuova* is a dry a lifeless allegory. (The word 'allegory' is enough to condemn anything, to many people!) No such thing. The *Vita Nuova* is to my thinking a record of actual experiences reshaped into a particular form [. . .] I do not reject the part of allegory. Allegory itself may be only a mode of expression of a mind passionately eager to find order and significance in the world – though it may find order or set order in ways which we have come to neglect.[650]

Not only is Eliot encouraging allegorical readings, but also an alternative tradition which is not strictly literary: «Dante, in his place and time, was following something more essential than merely a 'literary' tradition.»[651] This amounts to a rejection of contemporary approaches as illustrated by Benedetto Croce's 'On the Nature of Allegory' and Remy de Gourmont's *Dante* (1929) to which Eliot refers in his own *Dante.* His comment implies that allegory is more than a literary device, but it is a scaffold on which to order experience simultaneously informed by a whole cultural worldview, including philosophy and theology. This view of tradition amounts to an important variation from the one he proposed in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. Through allegory Eliot is able to further historicize the 'historical sense' otherwise showing all the symptoms of an inert transcendence. Tradition becomes now more than an ordering and re-

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[648] Auerbach, 'Figura', p. 54.

[649] Auerbach', 'Figura', p. 36.

[650] The Clark Lectures, Lecture III [Donne and the *Trecento*], pp. 97-98.

[651] *Dante*, p. 65.

ordering of works of art, but a reference to the historicism implied in *all* cognitive constructions of meaning.

Walter Benjamin points out that allegory «establishes itself most permanently where provisionality and eternity confront each other most closely». He is also aware of the important historical dimension of allegory; it inhabits the centre of the temporal cross of figural prophecy. Though he is happy to stick to the term 'allegory' Benjamin idealises the possibility of the sort of temporal inhabitation he attributes to it and which appears indistinguishable from the symbol:

> The measure of time for the experience of the symbol is the mystical instant in which the symbol assumes the meaning into its hidden and, if one might say so, wooded interior.[652]

The difference between allegory and symbol becomes clearer later, when Benjamin addresses the sort of deferral involved in allegory. The problem of allegory is not so much that of linking two events in time, but in renewing the process as the link proves provisional. This is the inevitable allegorical deferral of symbolic closure which Walter Benjamin regards as *mourning*. Mourning is the mode of allegory always at the borderline between loss and ecstasy: it is the point of loss as it is fulfilled – Christ's incarnation and death – and the ecstasy in the promise of recuperation – in the Second Coming and the resurrection of the body.[653] This promise is made tangible as it is pre-figured by Christ's own resurrection after his death. This deferral is, as a critic puts it, where «an anticipation is substituted for fulfilment.»[654] We find a similar idea in Julia Kristeva's analysis of the sign; she identifies grief as the moment when the sign brings the symbolic down to earth but «retain[s] only a tenuous relationship with the transcendental idea.»[655] However she fails to identify in this grief the temporality, both of loss and

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652 Walter Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* (1928), John Osborne trans. (London: Verso, 1996), p. 165.

653 Mourning is at the heart of Eliot's *Ariel Poems*. In these poems expectation is undercut by disappointment, yet it is governed by the prophetic hermeneutics of allegory which encourage hope and further understanding. This role is carried out principally by the last of the *Ariel Poems*, 'The Cultivation of Christmas Trees', which asks us to reread the poems with a sense of forward, if recurrent, progress. It concludes with the words:
«Because the beginning shall remind us of the end
And the first coming of the second coming», (ll. 33-4, p. 118).

654 A. C. Charity, *Events and Their After-Life: Dialectics of Christian Typology in the Bible and Dante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 230.

655 Julia Kristeva, 'From Symbol to Sign' in *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 67.

expectation, we find in Benjamin's mourning which parallels more closely figural prophecy. To illustrate this point we should turn to Dante Alighieri's own allegorical work, *Vita Nuova*, which turns the debate about allegorical time into a consideration of the relationship between the real and the ideal.

The Failure of Discourse: *Vita Nuova* and 'Paradiso'

In Dante's *Vita Nuova* we are presented with a deliberate juxtaposition of diachronic and synchronic time, in the form of prose and lyric time. In this work Dante presents retrospective episodes from his youth illustrated by poems he wrote at the time, presumably as the events took place. It is an account of adolescent experience: Dante's discovery of love, as he falls in love with Beatrice, and its loss, as she dies. The narrative moves linearly from their meeting untill Beatrice's death and its aftermath; however, this linearity is challenged. The account is retrospective and the narrative time exploits that foreknowledge. It does this both by introducing prose commentaries of the poems and by prefiguring the events before they actually happen in the linear time of the work. That is the case of the central event – the death of Beatrice – which is prefigured by other deaths within the narrative: her father's and that of a female friend. The temporal paradox is that the death of Beatrice culminates the narrative time just as it fulfils its foreknowledge, yet it struggles to project that foreknowledge towards a new recovery.

The scholarly debates around *Vita Nuova* – as with *The Divine Comedy* – tend to concentrate on the importance of perceiving Beatrice as a real historical person, or, else, on seeing her as a *mere* allegory of Love. Eliot participates in this debate with a clear concern about avoiding any mere poetic allegorization of the events described in the poem. He states in *Dante*:

> A great deal of scholarship has been directed upon examination of the early life of Dante, in connection with the *Vita Nuova*. Critics may be roughly divided into those who regard it as primarily biographical, and those who regard it as primarily allegorical.[656]

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[656] *Dante*, p. 61.

Although Eliot admits that «it is easy to make out a case for its being an entire allegory: for asserting, that is, that Beatrice is merely a personification of an abstract virtue, intellectual or moral,»[657] he adds that:

> I find it an account of a particular kind of experience: that is, of something which had actual experience (the experience of the 'confession' in the modern sense) *and* intellectual and imaginative experience (the experience of thought and the experience of dream) as its materials; and which became a third kind.[658]

Eliot's reference to *experience* stresses a cognitive hold on the semiotics of allegory. The subtext to this quotation is the problem of personality. Eliot gets closer to defining the sort of personal experience which is only implied in his theory of impersonality; an experience he sometimes expresses as a sort of mysticism.[659] This experience is of two kinds – actual and intellectual or imaginative -, which parallels the real-ideal dichotomy. Allegory by-passes this to produce an experience of a third kind which is not simply actual or intellectual: «[it] is neither a 'confession' nor an 'indiscretion' in the modern sense, nor is it a piece of Pre-Raphaelite tapestry.»[660] This allusion to a third kind of experience recalls mystical experience in terms of Eliot's Clark Lectures and the relation of faith to experience in *Dante* discussed above.[661] He proposes that the sort of experience Dante's poetry offers is mediated by the intellect, but operates on us as an actuality. In this sense the sort of experience evoked by allegory is beyond belief and disbelief, it simply *is*. It is an ontological fulfilment where Being relates both to being down *here* and being up *there*:

> If you can read the poetry as poetry, you will 'believe' in Dante's theology exactly as you believe in the physical reality of his journey; that is, you suspend both belief and disbelief.[662]

Questions of intellectual empathy are relegated to the actuality of the experience. The theology and the poetry reconcile to make a greater whole which is presented to the senses beyond questions of truth or error:

> If you have the sense of intellectual and spiritual realities that Dante had, then a form of expression like the *Vita Nuova* cannot be classified as 'truth' or 'fiction'.[663]

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657 *Dante*, p. 62.

658 *Dante*, p. 63.

659 See 'Mysticism and Self-consciousness', Chapter 5.

660 *Dante*, p. 63.

661 See 'I. A. Richards and the Theory of Belief', Chapter 5.

662 *Dante*, pp. 42-43.

663 *Dante*, p. 63.

Thus Eliot by-passes any commitment to either mere allegorical or literal readings of the *Vita Nuova* by offering an experiential thirdness beyond Good and Evil. This transition is enabled by Eliot's awareness of the phenomenal prophecy at work in *Vita Nuova.*[664] The figurative medium of the allegory acts as a retrospective prophecy of the events in Dante's life avoiding *mere* allegory, on the one hand, or personal history – biography -, on the other. The events are reorganized just as they become meaningful which in no way alters the literal reality of Dante's experience as reported in *Vita Nuova.*[665] Dante's love for Beatrice acquires a religious meaning which is not transcendent because it is permeated by the literalness of the earthly events of Dante's youth, just as his life becomes, in turn, more than a succession of events. This bridging of the literal and the spiritual enacts the doctrine of the Incarnation, itself the source of figural interpretation. However, the resolution of the relationship between Beatrice's personality and its allegorical signification does not achieve completion in *Vita Nuova.*

In *Vita Nuova* Dante's adolescent love for Beatrice becomes a literal encounter with Love's personification who advises Dante to disguise his emotions by pretending to love ladies other than Beatrice. This advice radicalizes Dante's ideal pursuit of Love as an end in itself in the Provençal courtly love tradition; a pursuit which amounts to the depersonalized idealization of the object of love. However, Dante's progress in *Vita Nuova* defies this idealization ultimately rejecting the abstract personification of Love, thus enabling a *particular* exercise of his emotions for a real person, but without undermining the universality of his emotions. As this process gets underway, the allegorical personification of Love is rendered useless by Beatrice. Dante warns us:

> It may be that at this point some person, worthy of having any doubt cleared up, could be puzzled at my speaking of Love as if it were a thing in itself, as if it were not only an intellectual substance but also a

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[664] It is worth reading A. D. Nuttall's *Two Concepts of Allegory* (pp. 15-48) where he argues against figural interpretations of allegory in *The Divine Comedy.*

[665] Eliot referred to the *meaningful* alteration of past events through recollection in his doctoral thesis in the following way: «We are attempting to recall, let us say, a public address which we have heard. If memory were simply a restoration of the past, we might expect to recall first the fragments of the sentences which the speaker uttered, rather than the sense which we extracted therefrom. For these sounds which he uttered take precedence in time of the meaning; [. . .] the fact that we recall the meaning, in most cases, before we recall the actual words, would imply that the past presents itself in a different time-order than that of the objective time in which the events are held to have taken place», *KE*, p. 50.

> bodily substance. This in all truth is false, for Love does not exist in itself as a substance, but rather it is an accident in substance [. . .] it appears that I assume Love to be a body.[666]

In Dante, the actual experience of the real is actively bridging over the intellectual experience of the ideal. This initiates the process by which Love as a personification is exorcised yet re-incarnated in Beatrice. Thus, as Robert Pogue Harrison notes in *The Body of Beatrice*, «transcendence . . . is externalised and embodied. Love traverses the boundaries of psychic interiority and enters the arena of existential facticity»[667] of real persons in real time. This incarnation is enabled by the poem's figural prophecy, which operates as the retrospective foreknowledge of the events as they are recollected in time. The incarnation is made operative precisely at the point of achieving the fulfilment of the foreknown and preannounced death of Beatrice. Death is the end, yet it is a temporal fulfilment that precludes a new beginning as it initiates the process of mourning for the living, and the after-life for the dead. By making the end into the start of a new fulfilment the spiritual release is re-captured by the world in the promise of a renewed worldly fulfilment. So Love's incarnation in Beatrice requires her death by way of subjecting her body to the reverse process of becoming spirit, but which, in so doing, awakens the intimate link with its corporeal existence now melancholically seeking restoration in the hope of resurrection.

Paradoxically, it is Beatrice's *end* which affirms her corporeal existence as a real *loved* person. The theme of death and mourning recalls Walter Benjamin's approach to allegory in *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*¡, where he adds:

> And if it is in death that the spirit becomes free, in the manner of spirits, it is not until then that the body too comes properly into its own. For this much is self-evident: the allegorization of the physis can only be carried through in all its vigour in respect of the corpse [...] it is only thus as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory.[668]

Vita Nuova's figural prophecy, transforms the mourning of loss into mourning *as* beginning. Prophetic anticipation makes the fulfilment meaningful, so that the loss – the end or death's temporal boundary as it is crossed – does not mean the end of time but a renewed anticipation. Whatever transcendentality there is about meaning, is swiftly re-captured for and by the world;

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[666] Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, Mark Musa trans., The World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), Canto XXV, p. 53.

[667] Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 52.

[668] Benjamin, p. 217.

it is the kind of transcendentality, as Benjamin notes, through which «the body comes properly into its own», and with the body all things historical and temporal. That we do not know what we have got till is gone, is in itself a kind of meaningful recovery. A recovery which, though definite, as we noted above, is provisional because no matter how Dante looks at it, Beatrice has, at least for the moment, gone.

The provisionality of the temporal fulfilment of death is the problem Dante fails to solve in *Vita Nuova*. Death takes place in the middle of the work, while the ending of the book reverts back to personification as Dante proves unable to deal with death. In effect Dante takes comfort in the permanence of death as a form of consolation; fulfilment is mistaken as an ending forgoing the challenge of invoking a new beginning. The result is a personification relapse as Beatrice finds a substitute which endangers her endurance as a real person. This is illustrated by the scholarly debate over the identity of the Lady of the Window who appears at the end of *Vita Nuova* to console Dante. It can be argued that the Lady of the Window represents the return of personification and, with it, of symbolism; that the Lady of the window is the sober comfort provided by Philosophy – Minerva. Dante admits defeat as the provisionality of Beatrice's death becomes final and the hope of anticipating a renewed point of contact seems lost - for there is a fine line between hope and melancholy. Thus the link between semiotics and temporality becomes most apparent as Dante's effort fails to sustain the expectations of figural prophecy turn into a symbolic relapse – or *mere* allegory.

One could argue that the failure of the *Vita Nuova* is precisely what attracts Eliot to this work. He is particularly curious about minor poetry, what he calls of the 'second order' in *The Sacred Wood.*[669] This preference lies in the transparency that the imperfect work offers, as he suggests in *Dante*:

> All of Dante's 'minor works' are important, because they are works of Dante; but the *Vita Nuova* has a special importance, because it does more than any of the others to help us to a fuller understanding of the *Divine Comedy* [. . .] But the *Vita Nuova* is a youthful work, in which some of the methods and design, and explicitly the intention, of the *Divine Comedy* are shown.[670]

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669 'Introduction', *SW*, p. xiv.

670 *Dante*, p. 61.

This is the feature Eliot exploits in the Metaphysical poets too, as if the real poetic revelation appears most clearly in the imperfect edges of the structure. Eliot finds consolation in this imperfection as it parallels his own struggle with the realisation of discourse, no doubt spurred on by his fallen vision of human life reflected by the Original Sin. Like Dante Eliot must fight off the temptation of personification. In the absence of a perfect formula of reconciliation between the carnal and the metaphysical he must, at times, content himself with struggling against the false consolation of the Lady of the Window, as his ambivalent trust of science made evident in his early criticism. It is an attempt to regain faith in a discourse which fails to offers definite meaning, yet only offers meaning if we believe that it will make sense in *the end* even if the end is not final. If Eliot turned to science in his early literary criticism having failed to articulate the metaphysics of Bradley, Dante turned to philosophical discourse – following the advice of the Lady at the Window – by writing the *Convivio* after the problems of *Vita Nuova*. Both these attempts – Dante's and Eliot's – reach out for the cold comfort of personification in the form of reified philosophical absolutes, whether logical or scientific formulas.[671] However misguided, these attempts are comforting in a way that perfection is not; and there is a sense that Eliot is aware of the hopelessness of the scientific project from the start.[672] All of the rhetorical strategies with which Eliot experiments share this motif: that of offering an incarnation which struggles to avoid reifying itself in the process of its articulation. This mistrust of perfection can be used to understand Eliot's early literary criticism as a deliberate sabotage of the possibility of saying what he means even as he earnestly attempts to follow his projected scientific method in *The Sacred Wood.*

Lyndall Gordon notes Eliot's ambivalence towards perfection, not only in his discourse but in his life. She insists upon a parallel between Dante's Beatrice and Eliot's Emily Hale, and according to Gordon, Eliot's identification with the Dante of the *Vita Nuova*

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[671] These become equivalent concessions in science to personification in which «symbolic presentation becomes a permanent displacement of the authentic presentation; only the signs remain while the object vanishes completely from our attention in mathematical practice» (p. 82), as Newton Graver and Seung-Chong Lee suggest in *Derrida and Wittgenstein* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994) with reference to Husserl's struggle to make sense of the authentic presentation of the ideal content of numbers.

[672] I have suggested in Chapter 2 that Eliot's objective correlative fails to achieve definition precisely at the point where its fulfilment triggers the awareness of its impossibility. See 'The Parody of Science as Critical Style'.

illustrates his own loss and disillusion with earthly love which culminated in his conversion and vows of celibacy in 1926; a loss which seemed, for Eliot, irreparable in this life. Gordon notes that Emily Hale re-established contact with Eliot in 1927 after thirteen years of silence. She was asking him for advice on a lecture on modern poetry she was about to give. As Gordon puts it:

> Their eventual reunion was propelled by a dream that took the space of a long separation to take hold. To dream of meeting an old love, after many years, was a replay of Dante's reunion with Beatrice on the verge of Paradise, as Eliot saw it the recrudescence of old passions in a new emotion, in a new situation which «comprehends, enlarges and gives meaning to it'. Like Beatrice, Eliot's Lady forgives the poet his defection.[673]

The 'disaffection' tangentially refers to Dantes's false consolation in the Lady of the Window. After the loss, however, it is the recuperation which proves the more problematic. For, as Gordon stresses, it is the comfort of asceticism which proves the real temptation for the ascetic. She sees Eliot, not as an untroubled convert to the peace of transcendence, but constantly haunted by the thought of escapism. Gordon continues:

> It is easy to justify a solitary religious position in the case of monks and nuns which have incurred no other obligation; less easy where the solitary path cuts through human obligation. It has then to be self-serving, and the denial of other obligations implies a belief in the exclusiveness of the soul's superior instants.[674]

Eliot suspects that the way to divine love must be attained through natural love. But Gordon over-stresses the synthesis between Eliot's biography and his poetry. That is a strong temptation, and one which Eliot himself addresses in his approach to the *Vita Nuova* in his *Dante* (1929) when he considers the relation of allegory to biography. Though Eliot praises Dante's capacity to make these two experiences of a third kind, it is not a perfect synthesis that he is implying. The separation of the man who suffers from the mind that creates is not an imperative, but an inevitability which Eliot encourages us to embrace. Such separation is clearer in Eliot's criticism. The rhetoric of his critical writing – if a more imperfect vehicle – affords that vision. The *Vita Nuova* is after all a «curious medley of verse and prose»[675], an exercise of a new kind of criticism rather than a perfect poetic expression.[676]

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[673] Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 11-12.
[674] Gordon, p. 12.
[675] *Dante*, p. 61.
[676] With reference to Eliot's critical style Lewis Freed notes that «the style is normally condensed, concentrated, and suggestive, in the way that Eliot thinks poetry should be written. In effect, the prose does what the poetry is supposed to do – replace the philosophy», *T. S. Eliot: The Critic as Philosopher* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1979), p. 207.

Eliot's rhetorical strategies in his criticism follow this pattern of postponement, more afraid of getting it right than getting it wrong. Perhaps that is why Eliot takes his time before fully addressing Dante in his Literary Criticism, giving priority to the less perfect poetic model afforded by the Metaphysical poets. In Dante this postponement – or deliberate falling short of fulfilment – is more clearly illustrated by *Vita Nuova* than by the *Divine Comedy*. However, there is an important case to be made about the latter. The paradox of 'Paradiso' is that – insofar as it is the completion of the journey – it is the least visual, if the most perfect, of the three stages of the *Commedia*, and the most philosophical. In *Dante*, Eliot hints at his preference for the visual damnation of 'Inferno' instead of the innocuous transparency of the 'Paradiso':

> The Comedy initiates us into the world of medieval imagery, in the Inferno most apprehensible, in the Paradiso most rarefied.[677]

The fact remains that Dante seems unable to escape the consolation of philosophy, even and particularly in the perfection of 'Paradiso'. Words are more prone to fail us in the face of perfection. It paradoxically puts into question the hope of a final arrival, which promises the meaningful conclusion of our every earthly postponement. It questions perfection because just as we arrive its articulation proves none the easier. These are Dante's own words:

> I was in the heaven that most receives His light and I saw things which he who descends from it has not the knowledge or the power to tell again; for our intellect, drawing near to its desire, sinks so deep that memory cannot follow it.[678]

Ironically Dante has to resort to philosophical discourse just at the point when one would have expected it was safe to leave it behind. The various planetary spheres which make up heaven are inhabited by a number of philosophers, theologians, Saints and evangelists, including St Thomas Aquinas, St Bernard, St Bonaventure and St John. The danger is that as ordinary discourse fails, one inevitably imposes a doctrinal account – theological or philosophical – of events which may remain occult to those who do not share the belief. The very point of allegory – to by-pass doctrinal differences by appealing to the experience of ordinary cognition – seems thus lost. Yet Eliot insists that this is not strictly the case:

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677 *Dante*, p. 68.

678 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, John Sinclair ed., 3 vols., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), III, 'Paradiso», Canto I, p. 19.

> My point is that you cannot afford to ignore Dante's philosophical and theological beliefs, or to skip the passages which express them most clearly; but that on the other hand you are not called upon to believe them yourself.[679]

For Eliot, explicit philosophical and theological discourse legitimise their inhabitations of the cognitive scaffold of allegory, not only because cognition in not being immediate is already mediated by doctrine, but because doctrine in this environment becomes itself a matter of cognitive experience. 'Paradiso' most dramatically exploits the ambiguity between memory and re-enactment. Eliot adds:

> When I speak of understanding, I do not mean merely knowledge of books or words, any more than I mean belief: I mean a state of mind in which one sees certain beliefs.[680]

In allegory one sees beliefs like one sees objects. Just like material space and events in time acquire meaning through a particular worldview, so the worldview becomes a concrete experience in allegory; it is really *viewing* a world As far as Eliot's critical discourse is concerned, allegory enables the re-incorporation of the rejected metaphysics of his early literary criticism. This allegorical strategy is at work in Eliot's debate over the simultaneous historicity and universality of Metaphysical poetry, as he plays with the term 'metaphysical' and the possibility of its definition as both a branch of philosophy and as an event in the seventeenth century.[681] It is an attempt to incarnate metaphysics through his critical discourse, and rescue it from a negative existence just as he attempts to rescue his critical discourse from the vagueness and negative reasoning epitomized by 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*'. It involves the positing of metaphysics as a particular philosophical expression without becoming exclusive because it is not simply an intellectual experience but retains the element of dream inherent in ordinary cognition. This formula refers once again to the mystical experience present on Dante's poetry. In *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, Murray notes that:

> Other mystical poets o poets of vision may indeed have recorded experiences just as far 'beyond the range of ordinary men', but none of them has kept such a firm hold at the same time on the immediate, visible world [. . .] It is true, of course, that everything we see and experience now is somehow deepened and expanded

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679 *Dante*, p. 42. In *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism: The Secret History of the Four Quartets*(London: MacMilla, 1994), Paul Murray seconds Eliot's words with reference to *Four Quartets*: «Those readers who bring to the *Quartets* a certain 'theological equipment' do not necessarily therefore have an advantage over the less endowed», Murray, p38.

680 *Dante*, p. 44.

681 See 'The Clark Lectures and Metaphysical Definitions', in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

> through the alchemy of Dante's vision; but the old visible world that is familiar to us is never completely lost to sight.[682]

The test in Eliot's criticism is to wonder whether the reader needs to know the philosophy that informs it to understand its meaning. Murray feels that this is certainly not the case in *Four Quartets*: «Those readers who bring to the *Quartets* a certain 'theological equipment' do not necessarily therefore have advantage over the less endowed.»[683]

'Paradiso' effectively enacts this rescue precisely because it risks philosophical exclusivity. Dante's arrival at 'Paradiso' is far from simple. The dramatic edge of Beatrice's rebuke of Dante as she first meets him in Heaven stresses her human nature just at the point of her transfiguration into divinity; a transformation which risks a literalness which could easily be confused with mere personification and occult meaning. Dante in the *Divine Comedy* risks the confusion of Beatrice with Divine Love. Not even in Heaven is poetic perfection as divine vision available, and the dualism between criticism and poetry – prose and lyric time – of the *Vita Nuova* is not completely overcome; it demands a greater leap of faith over the explicit doctrinal artifice behind the ordering of Heaven which defies earthly perception. Thus Beatrice's rebuke to Dante is:

> 'Thou makest thyself dull with false fancies so that thou canst not see as thou wouldst if thou hadst cast them off; thou art not on earth as thou thinkst'.[684]

Dante warns us against the possibility of meaningfully using discourse in Heaven by stating in Canto I: «The passing beyond humanity cannot be set forth in words»[685], yet he goes on to write twenty-two more cantos. This is enabled by explicit theological mediation. Instead of the Lady of the Window, Dante offers the testimony of philosophers and theologians who literally appear before our eyes in the divine spheres. Philosophy is not impersonally personified but incarnated and historically thematized even as the vision is not of this world. This effect pushes suspension of disbelief to breaking point. Just as we were captured by the meaningful vividness of the images of Inferno we are now prepared to reverse the process and be captured by a meaning that becomes vivid, as the sound of the words demand a meaning and defy their

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682 Murray, p. 240-1.

683 Murray, p. 38.

684 Dante, 'Paradiso', Canto I, p. 23.

685 Dante, 'Paradiso', Canto I, p. 23

figurative status. It is at this point that one *sees* philosophy. The philosophy does not fall on deaf ears, as its words do not prove empty for the initiated. This reversal is at work in Beatrice's words as she tries to explain to Dante his ascension through the heavenly bodies:

> 'If I am right, though shouldst no more wonder at thy ascent than at a stream falling from a mountain-height to foot; it would be a wonder in thee if, freed from hindrance, thou hadst remained below, as on earth would be stillness in living flame'.[686]

This is not a mere metaphor. Beatrice's argument relies precisely on taking the metaphor literally, even as it remains a figure of speech. She is not so much saying that heaven is *like* the earth, but encourages a point of identity in their difference. Human cognition is thus validated in Heaven as it is on earth, not for its ordinariness, but for its being already extraordinary.

Allegory is a process which, I have been arguing, Eliot uses as a model for the re-invention of rhetoric as a legitimate writing practice, and which holds the key for understanding the reconciliation and use of philosophy in his criticism. «Such figures», Eliot tells us in *Dante*, «are not merely antiquated rhetorical devices, but serious and practical means of making the spiritual visible.»[687] This is an issue which Lewis Freed addresses in *T. S. Eliot: The Critic as Philosopher* where he notes:

> The problem we set out to define is roughly this: we cannot, as a rule, find meaning for Eliot's language in the context of popular thought; and what is more, owing to the style of the critical prose and the character of the philosophy, it is not easy to find a meaning in the context of the philosophy – or at least to state it in an intelligible way.[688]

Freed does not seem to see a way out of this problem, though ironically his own book frequently collapses into the very philosophical difficulties he is trying to combat. This obscurity results from his attempts to subject Eliot's critical philosophy to a systematic philosophical scrutiny which it does not offer. This is precisely what this thesis is trying not to do. It is, instead, through the understanding of the allegorical blue-print of Eliot's rhetorical strategies that one can deduce the extent to which Eliot manages to *see* and makes us see philosophy even if we do not live, like Dante, «in an age in which men still saw visions.»[689] The sound of the sense of the word becomes the contemporary medium of achieving the

686 Dante, 'Paradiso', Canto I, p. 25.
687 *Dante*. p. 54.
688 Freed, p. 188.
689 *Dante*, p. 23.

cognitive immediacy of allegory; which, however, falls short of the point of faith which Eliot ultimately strives for. His prose remains *rhetorically* difficult and self-conscious, yet this is the price he embraces as a means to overcome its would be *philosophical* obscurity. Yet it seeks through this rhetoric a literal apprehension – allegory does not get on well with metaphors – in ways that the language of science could only parody in *The Sacred Wood.* 'Literal' does not mean one-dimensional, but intelligible, where in rhetorical terms it refers to the sound of the sense of the word.

Chapter 7

Historicism and Style as Prophecy

Just as Eliot develops a rhetoric based on the figurative strategies of allegory which allow him to reconcile philosophy with the cognitive immediacy his early literary criticism seeks, his historicism can also be understood in terms of the phenomenal prophecy of allegorical hermeneutics. This chapter will argue that allegory not only enables Eliot to resolve his critical negativity by offering him a cognitive model for a new kind of rhetoric, but simultaneously allows him to articulate a definite historicism of the present, which redefines what is to be understood by 'modernity'. The importance of this historicism is that it allows Eliot to release the finitude of the present from its Bradleyan solipsistic implications, opening it up both to the past and the future. The finite experience of the present in history acts as the cognitive immediacy of the literal in allegory and rescues Eliot's negative discourse transforming it into a rhetoric of presence. This is a model which can, and should be applied to Eliot's own critical development, as a way of determining the coherence of his thought just as he seems to revise his opinions in later criticism. This approach has particular importance in relation to Eliot's often disliked dogmatic tone because it opens up further readings which check the apparent inflexibility of his discourse.

Prejudice and the Metaphysical Perspective

Prejudice is something that could be seen to be inherent in the subjectivity of Bradley's finite centres. The claustrophobia of the finite centre can only be transcended, as Bradley implies in 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', by a community of like-minded interpretants which in turn checks its exclusivity through skepticism and the inherent negativity of discourse of not stating directly what one thinks. The skeptical check of absolute prejudice is apparent to Eliot who notes in his introduction to Wilson Knight's *The Wheel of Fire* (1930) that

> without pursuing that curious and obscure problem of the meaning of interpretation farther, it occurs to me as possible that there may be an essential part of error in all interpretation, without which it would not be

> interpretation at all: but this line of thought may be persevered in by students of [Bradley's] *Appearance and Reality*.[690]

Any critical engagement is inherently erroneous given that interpretation can never claim to grasp the thing itself, hence the consolidation of interpretation as conviction may be arrived at through what can only be prejudice. Eliot adds:

> It has taken me a long time to recognize the justification of what Mr Wilson Knight calls 'interpretation'. In my previous skepticism I am quite ready to admit the presence of elements of pure prejudice, as well as some which I defend.[691]

This is an ambiguous introductory sentence. One is not quite sure whether Eliot sees the 'pure prejudice' in all 'interpretation' or only in his 'previous skepticism'. The ambiguity reaches its climax with the admission that there are some elements of prejudice he had then which he still defends now. If Eliot is suggesting that skepticism is a form of prejudice, one is forced to reconcile two apparently exclusive modes of thought. Skepticism could be seen as the least prejudiced of any possible form of judgement because it involves a constant dissatisfaction with given truths. Eliot may be suggesting that prejudice, even in the *safest* form of jugement, is inescapable. If he has prejudices *now*, Eliot implies that he must have had them *then*. This is the necessary historical prejudice of reading the past in terms of the present, which Eliot attenuates through the ambiguity of the statement. The implication being that he had prejudices unconsciously – lack of self-consciousness is perhaps the nature of 'pure' prejudice – which he now embraces consciously. Through this admission he is revising the philosophical discourse of his previous skepticism. The philosophical skepticism which *then* identified prejudice in every critical discourse that involves interpretation, is *now* seen as itself prejudiced. As Eliot recognizes this limitation, he does not shed those hidden prejudices but exorcises them by naming them.

Eliot's early philosophical scepticism was, by his own admission in 1930, inescapably metaphysical and prejudiced. His consequent turn to science in the late 1910s resulted from a philosophical skepticism that attempted to revise metaphysical inference with a discourse which, as it turns out, is no less prejudiced regardless of its explicit rejection of

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690 Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (1930), T. S. Eliot intro. (London: Methuen, 1962), p. xx.

691 'Introduction', *The Wheel of Fire*, p. xiii.

metaphysics. Yet, the acknowledgement of prejudice invokes a conscious return to the discourse of philosophy in the 1920s. This philosophical come back, however, follows significant rhetorical strategies which aim to avoid going as far as asserting it as ideology, but rather take the form of preferences of taste. Thus, in the introduction to *The Wheel of Fire*, Eliot's philosophical bias takes the form, not of particular philosophical principles, but of the particular type of literature he likes. He states that he has

> always maintained, not only that Shakespeare was not a philosophical poet in the sense of Dante and Lucretius; but also, what may be more easily overlooked, that 'philosophical poets' like Dante and Lucretius are not really philosophers at all.[692]

Philosophy re-appears in Eliot's criticism undefined, simply as 'philosophy' in literature. That Dante is and Shakespeare is not a philosophical poet invokes the need of definition which Eliot's introduction to *The Wheel of Fire* does not meet 'Philosophy' is thus *presented* in a way that promises a gradual re-definition.[693] Bradley's negativity is latent in Eliot's critical logic even in 1930, yet this time he goes further towards revealing his own personal philosophical taste:

> Now it is only a personal prejudice of mine, that I prefer poetry with a clear philosophical pattern [. . .] but this preference means merely a satisfaction of more of my own needs, not a judgement of superiority or even statement that I enjoy it more as poetry. I like a definite and dogmatic philosophy, preferably a Christian and Catholic one, but alternatively that of Epicurus or of the Forest philosophers of India.[694]

Eliot is still trying hard to stay this side of reductive dogmatism by embracing dogmatism in general – not just Christian. This statement is enabled by the previous quotation, in which the term 'philosophical' is offered as a general word rather than as an expression of particular ideology, so that being 'philosophical' does not necessarily imply a dogmatic tie with particular a philosophical school.

Eliot revises his early engagement with solipsistic skepticism in philosophy – which finds its own impossibility in the difficulty of providing a scientific description of the world – by developing a criticism which challenges the negativity of philosophical discourse in which

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692 'Introduction', *The Wheel of Fire*, p. xiii.

693 This is a rhetorical device he had already used in *The Sacred Wood* in an attempt to qualify his apparent scientific allegiance: «Aristotle had what is called the scientific mind – a mind which, as it is rarely found among scientists except in fragments, might better be called the intelligent mind», 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 13.

694 'Introduction', *The Wheel of Fire*, p. xvi.

he finds himself hiding. If what turns him away from metaphysics is its ineffability he must then try its positive articulation rather than leave it out of the question, because metaphysics simply will not go away. The impact of the philosophical articulation of metaphysics is clear in the literary criticism promoted in Eliot's introduction to *The Wheel of Fire*:

> Finally, the skeptical practitioner of verse tends to limit his criticism to the appreciation of vocabulary and syntax, the analysis of line, metric and cadence; to stick as closely to the more trustworthy senses as possible [. . .] Or rather, tends to try to do this. For this exact and humble appreciation is only one ideal never quite arrived at or even so far as approximated consistently maintained. The restless demon in us drives us also to 'interpret' whether we will or not.[695]

And just as the objectivity of scientific description must give in to the restless demon of metaphysics and interpretation, philosophy re-appears triumphally in all its metaphysical glory:

> Our impulse to interpret a work of art [. . .] is exactly as imperative and fundamental as our impulse to interpret the universe by metaphysics.[696]

Furthermore, to attempt to avoid metaphysics like those who would label the universe meaningless is, for Eliot,

> to fall more flat than the flimsiest construction of metaphysics. And Bradley's apothegm that 'metaphysics is the finding of a bad reason for what we believe upon instinct; but to find the reason is no less an instinct', applies as precisely to the interpretation of poetry.[697]

This 'bad reason' is the adoption of particular prejudice that, in general, may give identity to the metaphysical drive, but whose contiguity with it may be questionable. Philosophy is being re-defined in metaphysical terms, as belief-systems, and, as the shift takes place, philosophy paradoxically opens up to cultural identity and different historical epochs.

The Sincerity of Self-consciousness

The latent metaphysical historicism in Eliot's early literary criticism can be exposed with reference to Hans-Georg Gadamer's historical horizons, which for Harriet Davidson are unproblematic. In her rendering,

> The horizon of our world is not limited to our physical experience, but includes the awareness brought to us by the structures of our language [. . .] Thus our horizon extends far beyond our physical limits into the past

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695 'Introduction', *The Wheel of Fire*, p. xvi-xvii.

696 'Introduction', *The Wheel of Fire*, p. xvii.

697 'Introduction', *The Wheel of Fire*, p. xvii.

> and sometimes into other cultures, but our present situation is always included in our horizon. Our horizon is largely a common one; Gadamer is not speaking of a subjective, relative horizon.[698]

The crucial point is that Davidson takes for granted that the finitude of Gadamer's horizon is largely a common one. This unproblematic reconciliation of finitude and the transcendence of a common horizon contrasts with Richard Shusterman's alternative critique of Gadamer's horizons, who is less ready to correlate Gadamer's historicism with Eliot. There are parallels, and Shusterman is particularly clear in pointing them out, but there are also important differences:

> Eliot's account of how understanding merges perspectives not only prefigures Gadamer's idea of the fusion of horizons but seems superior to it. For Eliot avoids Gadamer's dubious transcendental device for fusion [. . .] This all-embracing horizon (which may recall Bradley's Absolute, for they both perform the same explanatory function of unifying divergent and narrower points of view) is not only a very questionable existence, but seems to contradict the very notion of an horizon, which implies finitude and limitation, i.e. that there is something beyond and not embraced by the horizon.[699]

This all-embracing horizon parallels Eliot's deculturized tradition in his early criticism. For Eliot, tradition is in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' a radical attempt to by-pass the isolated ego by positing historical universality as a literary realm which, however, is accessible only to those who are themselves artists. However, historical exclusivity remains a given which Eliot cannot ultimately resolve, if only in the attenuated version of art as universal culture. This is not to say that Eliot is not in fact deeply aware of the problem as much as Bradley was[700]; yet Eliot's historicism as articulated in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' fails to be an all-embracing horizon. Finitude and universality remain ultimately irreconcilable for *untalented* individuals, those who, it appears, must always be left out for the sake of intelligibility. Eliot's attempt to compensate for the artistic exclusivity of historical universality is deliberate. He does so through the impersonal theory of art which provides the makings for the articulation of the idea of a common cognitive ground which can be shared by all. Yet this attempt falls short of complete success. Eliot's impersonal theory of art attempts to provide this ground, although it

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[698] Harriet Davidson, *T.S. Eliot and Hermeneutics: Absence and Interpretation in 'The Waste Land'* (London: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), p. 50.

[699] Richard Shusterman, *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism* (London: Duckworth, 1988), p. 113-114.

[700] As Bradley puts it in 'The Presuppositions of Critical History': «The experience of others has no meaning for us except so far as it becomes our own; the existence of others is no existence for us if it is not in our world that they live», 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', F. H. Bradley, 'The Presuppositions of Critical History' (1874) in *Collected Essays*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), I, p. 19. See 'The Collective and the Individual in Critical History' in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

can only do so at the expense of overlooking the cultural variations of history Impersonality involves a theory of a radical finitude based on what verges on physiological materialism which ignores the subject's inhabitation of the horizon of a cultural present. Eliot's suspicion of culture as a common realm of experience is Arnoldean in origin, and which must find compensation in a *literary* tradition modelled in aesthetic experience as universal cognitive act.

Just as Eliot encourages the allegorical model to include the full consequences of history and enlarge the reductive aesthetics of impersonality, he is also aware that our habits of mind are different from those of Dante. We live in a world in which what we believe to be *literally* true may no longer be asserted with the *full* conviction which Eliot sees in Dante. This is the consequence of self-consciousness. It is not an ontological world of vision, beyond belief and disbelief that we live in, where transcendentality is never complete in its finitude. Ontology must be mediated epistemologically; presence is not immediately available. We are, in Eliot's words, dissociated, yet not beyond redemption; as he notes in 'Donne in Our Time' (1931), we can bridge over the chasm even if we no longer enjoy the medieval worldview:

> In Donne there is a manifest fissure between thought and sensibility, a chasm which in his poetry he bridged in his own way, which was not the way of medieval poetry.[701]

Donne is cognitively dissociated but he overcomes it through the exercise of a form of belief which Eliot describes as 'sincerity'; Donne was neither a believer in the medieval sense nor a sceptic in the modern. Eliot adds:

> He was a sincere churchman not because he had passed through the doubt which his type of mind finds congenial (I say his *type* of mind), but because in theology he had not yet arrived there. In short, this kind of religious belief differs both from that of the thirteenth century and that of the nineteenth and twentieth century; it was sincere.[702]

Donne represents a middle-way between unproblematic faith and the self-conscious faith of the *cogito*. Donne's belief is sincere, not for that matter untrue, yet not literally so. For Eliot, the key to this sincerity lies not in an interest in the truth of ideas, but in the ideas themselves which he contemplates as objects:

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701 T. S. Eliot, 'Donne in Our Time' in *A Garland for John Donne (1631-1931)*, ed. Theodore Spencer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), p. 8.

702 'Donne in Our Time', *A Garland for John Donne* , p. 9.

> [Donne] is interested in and amused by ideas in themselves, and interested in the way in which he *feels* an idea; almost as it were something that he could touch and stroke.[703]

This amounts to an ontological recovery through the reduction of ideas to finite forms which are cognitively felt. In this sense Eliot is reverting to the idea of philosophical poetry where philosophy becomes «almost a physical modification»[704] as he stated in 'Dante'.

One may wonder whether to keep the idea for itself amounts to an intellectual aestheticism which must only formally pass for faith; a reified personification. However, Eliot insists that it is not the idea itself in its symbolic existence that is felt by Donne, but the phenomenal thought that contains the idea: the thought itself *felt* as the sound of the meaning of the word. This interpretation compensates for the shortcomings of Donne's cognition, namely his lack of faith in the medieval sense. Eliot's interpretation gives way to his interest in the allegorical latency of rhetoric. This parallels his emphasis of Donne's conversational style as the bottom phenomenal line on which the idea rests in the poetry. As we have seen in the Clark lectures – from which 'Donne and Our Time' borrows heavily -, Eliot makes a distinction between the sound of the word from the sound *of the sense* of the word.[705] This linguistic dimension is represented, not so much by poetics, as by rhetoric.[706]

One must be clear not to confuse Eliot's stress on the phenomenal dimension of ideas in rhetoric with realism. As he pointed out in '«Rhetoric» and Poetic Drama' (1920):

> In plays of realism we often find parts which are never allowed to be consciously dramatic, for fear, perhaps, of their appearing less real. But in *actual* life [. . .] we are at times aware of ourselves in this way, and these moments are of very great usefulness to dramatic verse. A very small part of acting takes place on the stage! 707

The artificial self-consciousness of rhetoric illustrates an aspect of the actual; and thus Eliot continues the philosophical expansion of the real beyond what is merely realistic. His promotion of the conversational style as rhetoric, shows his increasing willingness to embrace self-consciousness despite its obstruction of the immediacy of the vision afforded by medieval allegory. This acceptance goes as far as finding in this self-consciousness a finitude which

703 'Donne in Our Time', *A Garland for John Donne* , p. 12.

704 'Dante', *SW*, p. 163.

705 The Clark Lectures, Lecture IV [The Conceit in Donne], *VMP*, p. 130.

706 See 'Rhetoric and the Sound of the Sense of the Word' in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

707 '«Rhetoric» and Poetic Drama', *SW*, p. 83.

reclaims a phenomenal validity. So much so that Eliot is able to recuperate the phonetic finitude of language as part of meaning, without, that is, falling into a reification of language as a system of autonomous sound patterns in the manner of music. In the type of rhetoric Eliot is promoting, the sound of language is intrinsically linked to thought patterns, for there is always an implied cognitive observer which must interpret those sounds, even if one is the only audience to one's self-consciousness. Eliot adds in 'Donne in Our Time':

> To turn the attention to the mind in this way is a kind of creation, because the objects alter by being observed so curiously. To contemplate an idea, because it is present for the moment in my own mind, to observe my emotion colour it, and to observe it colour my emotions.[708]

The impossibility of recovering the immediacy of the perception of objects is transformed into a controlled creative activity which falls short of subjective and aesthetic indulgence.[709] Eliot stays away from the serious danger of encouraging direct perception, while it restores the possibility of believing *literally* where the literal is not simply the real.

The cognitive redefinition of what is a literal understanding of the world of objects is historically exploited by Eliot to refer to the *situatedness* of the individual in history. On the one hand Eliot rescues the problem of self-consciousness in rhetoric as a virtue simply because it is true of the way we think *now*. It amounts to the historical awareness of existing in time; itself a feature of contemporaneity. The literal dimension of history is the present, just as objects are the literal world in which our cognition is inevitably caught. The inescapability of one's present stops being a problem as soon as Eliot sees in its contents the means of a qualified escape; thus conformity becomes a form of historical release through the inevitability of the cognitive distortion of being in time. Historical conformity and creativity are thus played off against each other just like the real and the ideal struggle for reconciliation in cognition. We

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708 'Donne in Our Time', *A Garland for John Donne*, p. 12.

709 Eliot is tangentially referring to the problem of colour as a secondary quality in John Locke's 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding'. This problem has important consequences in the debate over the physical foundations of cognition and in determining the degree of subjectivity it implies without undermining the existence of a causal ground of physical existence. Locke notes that «the *ideas of primary qualities* of bodies are *resemblances* of them, and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves; but the *ideas produced* in us *by* these *secondary qualities have no resemblance* of them all. There is nothing like our *ideas* existing in the bodies themselves. They are, in the bodies we denominate from them, only a power to produce those sensations in us; and what is sweet, blue, or warm in *idea* is but the certain bulk, figure, and motion of the insensible parts in the bodies themselves, which we call so», John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John W. Yolton ed., Everyman's Library (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1991), p. 60.

may not be able to *believe* like Dante could, but we can at least be *sincere* about our cultural environment however self-conscious one might be. Thus Donne is sincere because of his conventionality, which is to say that he is in *our* time precisely because he belongs to *his* time as evidenced by the conventionality of his rhetoric.

Eliot insists that Donne is not medieval, and thus, in one sweep, he debases the relationship of all subsequent ages to his preferred period, the Trecento. Historical ideality is overrun by the finite particularities of every present. The difference between '«Rhetoric and Poetic Drama' and Eliot's later developments is that, what is first idealized as the transcendentality of the finite centre's impersonality, now adopts the increasing finitude of particular cultural setting present to the individual perceiving subject. We do not overcome the isolation of the subjective ego by simply asserting the naked self-awareness of solitude, but by sharing the self-consciousness of the particular worldview present to ourselves. The bare soul of the impersonal finite centre must ultimately be clothed in with cultural interaction. For

> what is natural in one man is artificial in another; for a style is natural or artificial, just as it may be vigorous or insipid, according to the right expression of, whether its intimate union with a sincere, because integrated personality [. . .] And the artificial occurs when a man is trying to be, or trying to pretend to be, that which he is not and cannot be.[710]

All one can be expected to do is to be sincere in the way one relates to the reality of one's own time; that Donne's «mind was decidedly the mind of a man of his own age»[711], is not a deficiency but a virtue illustrated by the right expression in the terms Eliot sets out as good rhetoric; terms which point to the particular allegorical disposition of phenomenal cognition which historically translates as a contemporaneity towards one's time. Thus Eliot's indecision about the relation of the poet to history is finalised.[712] It is through one's present that one can connect with all ages in their own presence to themselves. In this sense Donne is, after all, in our time, and to this extent – in the absence of faith – sincerity supplants impersonality as a trans-historical cognitive model.

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710 'Donne in Our Time', *A Garland for John Donne*, p. 18.

711 'Donne in Our Time', *A Garland for John Donne*, p. 8.

712 See 'Blake and the Personality of Impersonality' in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Eliot contextualises his use of 'sincerity' by 1933 in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticisms* with reference of I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929) which Eliot had read before writing 'Donne in Our Time'. The term is used by Richards as a means to provide a model for genuine poetry and criticism; it invokes an ideal cognitive harmony between emotions and thoughts, as an alternative to the antithesis between dogma and disinterested appreciation. Richards is ultimately interested in a perfect model whose attainability he must from the beginning put in doubt. Richards notes:

> Sincere emotions, we say, are genuine or authentic, as opposed to spurious emotions [. . .] We may mean that the emotion is genuine in the sense that it is every product of a perfect mind would be genuine. It would result only from the prompting situation plus all the relevant experience of that mind, and be free from impurities and from all interference [. . .] Since such minds are nowhere obtainable in this obstructive world, such a sense is useful only as an ideal standard by which to measure degrees of relative insincerity.[713]

Richards's admission is pointless. He continues his argument with little regard for the insight taking for granted sincerity as an idealized plane which he models on the philosophy of Confucius. Richards demands an emotional purity only to be found, if at all, in the saint; and this is Eliot's point, that Richards omits the necessary historical content of the cognitive act he is promoting in criticism and poetry. This content, for Richards, forms part of the impurities and obstructions which undermine the sincerity of immediate emotional responses. To this, Eliot's response is clear: Richards, like Arnold, wants «to preserve emotion without the beliefs with which their history has been involved.»[714] Eliot's idea of sincerity attempts to import those very impurities as inherent parts of the cognitive process, by considering the importance of their proper incorporation in experience. Eliot appropriates Richards use of sincerity to invoke a historicized cognition and as a response to his own former theory of impersonality and to which Richards may be in effect alluding. (This shows the sort of misprisions Eliot has been subjected to by his followers, who paid little attention to his later critical development.) This reaction is perhaps already prefigured in the epigram introducing 'The Perfect Critic' which Eliot takes from Remy de Gourmont's *Lettres á 'Amazone*: «Eriger en lois ses impressions personelles, c'est le grand effort d'un homme s'il est sincère.»[715] Sincerity appears in this

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713 I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study in Literary Judgement* (1929) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 281.

714 *TUPUC*, p. 135.

715 'The Perfect Critic', *SW*, p. 1.

quotation as the attempt at reconciliation between the historical finitude of the individual and universal laws; between the transient and the permanent.

Sincerity is historical situatedness as a model for cognitive rigour in the personal experience of the world. It is a kind of faith whose rootedness in the Christian world is an admission one has to make if one is to be sincere. Richards mediates this religious link via Chinese philosophy as a means to neutralize the dogmatic 'interference' and 'obstructions' of his statement, but for Eliot he is simply «engaged in a rear-guard religious action.»[716] In the end this amounts to «the problem of religious faith and its substitutes»[717] by which critics and poets ultimately aim to de-dogmatise the poetic experience only to make poetry a higher kind of religious experience: «a modern equivalent for the theory of divine inspiration.»[718] For Eliot, this to fall «into the most dangerous of all dogmas – the dogma that we must do without dogma.»[719] Instead his own consideration of sincerity as a cognitive model deliberately addresses Christian dogma: mystical experience[720] and the theological historicism of figural prophecy. And it is at this point that one must clearly consider the differences between being dogmatic and being sincere. The difference is ultimately rhetorical and depends on the sincerity of one's expression in as much as this last is symptomatic on one's relation to the world one lives in.

The paradox of the permanent and the transient is perhaps more explicitly alluded to in Eliot's 'Baudelaire' (1930):

> Baudelaire was in some ways in advance of the point of view of his own time, and yet was very much of it, very largely partook of its limited merits, faults and fashions.[721]

Baudelaire's sincerity lies in his engagement with his world, not only at the level of the conventional that it offers him, but in the inherited difficulties which obstruct faith. Much of

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716 *TUPUC*, p. 135.
717 *TUPUC*, p. 125.
718 *TUPUC*, p. 137.
719 The Relationship Between Politics and Metaphysics', p. 11.
720 See Chapter 5, sections 'The Mystical *Via Positiva* and Rhetorical Incarnation' and 'Richards and the Theory of Belief'.
721 'Baudelaire', *SE*, p. 381.

this essay is devoted to Baudelaire's alleged Satanism and Eliot's insistence that this is a form of belief valuable in itself «an attempt to get to Christianity by the back door.»[722] Eliot sees in Baudelaire's Satanism a convoluted necessity to develop strategies to regenerate the fragments which the present has handed down to him. So that «[Baudelaire] might almost be said to be making again, as one man, the effort of scores of generations.»[723] He has to use anything that is given to him, however insufficient, as the basic material of reconstruction. In this lies his sincerity and heroism. This acquires further significance to Eliot given that part of the world Baudelaire inherits is a romantic one:

> Baudelaire belongs to a definite place and time. Inevitably the offspring of Romanticism, and by his nature the first counter-romantic in poetry, he could, like anyone else, only work with the materials that were there [. . .] If he is sincere, he must express with individual differences the general state of mind – not as a duty, but simply because he cannot help participating in it.[724]

Baudelaire's participation in romanticism does not amount to his being himself a romantic, in fact the opposite is true. Yet is it only through the participation that the reaction can be articulated. Thus Baudelaire's images strike one as second hand, Eliot tells us, but they also mean something else: «Baudelaire is the voice of his time; but I would observe that in Baudelaire, as in no one else, it is redeemed by meaning something else.»[725] This «meaning something else» is the transcendental opening of the literal historical time which stops our temporal belonging from becoming a mere prison of repetition; that is Baudelaire's redemption. The present is the inevitable cognitive and historical referent of every subject, which, in turn, is altered in the very process of being inhabited. This mechanism is thus allegorical.[726] Yet, allegory amounts to the controlling effort of making this alteration coherent and not arbitrary: it accepts in as much as it makes the present *something else.*

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722 'Baudelaire', *SE*, p. 383.

723 'Baudelaire', *SE*, p. 384.

724 'Baudelaire', *SE*, p. 386.

725 'Baudelaire', *SE*, p. 388.

726 «The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory», Martin Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in *Basic Writings: from 'Being and Time' (1927) to 'The Task of Thinking' (1964)*, David Farrell Krell ed. (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 145-146.

The Historical Sense of the Present

In an earlier essay entitled 'Baudelaire in Our Time' (1927), Eliot had dismissed the possibility of assessing Baudelaire's work on the assumption that the world present to the poet is recoverable. Eliot does this both in cognitive and historical terms. He states:

> We cannot be primarily interested in any writer's nerves (and remember please that 'nerves' used in this way is a very vague and unscientific term) or in any one's heredity except for the purpose of knowing to what extent that writer's individuality distorts or detracts from the objective truth which he perceives. If a writer sees truly – as far as he sees at all – this heredity and nerves do not matter.[727]

The first thing to notice is Eliot's redefinition of the scientific vocabulary typified by his theory of impersonality and scattered throughout the essays and reviews included in *The Sacred Wood*. What is perhaps interesting is to note that Eliot's reference to the scientific vocabulary of his earlier literary criticism demands its re-reading. This is in itself a test of the validity of his earlier methodology in the light of his later expansions; as re-readings may either prove the limitations of his earlier work or expand its meaning as the earlier work proves the prefiguration of the latter. The literal *scientific* meaning of 'nerves' is consecrated just as Eliot demands its figurative opening. The complexity of this demand is that in 'Baudelaire in Our Time' he means the term 'nerves' literally as a means to encourage the literal meaning along with the figurative. To achieve this, Eliot deliberately undermines the literal reading as a means to opening the figurative dimension, and thus reverses the expectations of a reader who can naturally be expected *not* to read the term literally in the first place. That «nerves» is used literally in the above passage becomes a semantic imperative if the reader is to understand what Eliot means by *truly seeing*. He is in fact making a distinction between perception and cognition as well as making clear that the importance of one's historical heritage is not one of immediate perceptual availability: to see one's time is not to perceive it literally but to mediate a vision through it, and in so doing figuratively *seeing* something else not necessarily *representative* of one's time. The strategy, however, insists on the importance of a literal dimension to our cognition; that both perception and the historical present remain as unchanged ground for the pseudo-creative effort of cognition. The construction of a world is not simply an arbitrary 'something else' or an empty figure of speech, it is an allegorically controlled

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727 'Baudelaire in Our Time', *FLA*, p. 91.

modification. This is the allegorical effort Eliot is demanding in the reading and re-reading of his criticism; to show the reader how much of its literal meaning accepts figurative interpretations which do not ultimately alter the original meaning of the text; how much, in other words, can Eliot's criticism be read allegorically. This is a point of style as much as of historicism; of reconciling what was meant then with what it means now.

The difficulty in articulating the degree to which historical context is important in the understanding of a statement is already inherent in Eliot's definition of poetic originality in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'[728]; only that in this essay the problem is attenuated by the implication that the history in which the poet participates is already atemporal and to some degree already *original*. As history is temporalized in Eliot's criticism, the reconciliation between heritage and originality becomes more difficult to articulate. So in 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca' (1927) Eliot seems to move in the other direction:

> In truth neither Shakespeare nor Dante did any real thinking – that was not their job; and the relative value of the thought current at their time, the material enforced upon each to use as the vehicle of their feelings, is of no importance. It does not make Dante a greater poet, or mean that we can learn more from Dante than from Shakespeare.[729]

The implications are of an ambiguous historicism which must take into account not only the final product on the page, but the conditions under which this final object was produced; that is, the relation of the author to his own time. Yet the relation of an author to his own time Eliot is proposing is not a simple historical contextualization, precisely because whether the conditions are good or bad the quality of the poet ultimately transcends that context; it does not make Dante the better poet. It is the relation that counts – the sincerity – not the details of the context in itself, even if it means that, as he put it in 'Baudelaire in Our Time', we have to find the details for the «purpose of knowing to what extent that writer's individuality distorts or detracts from the objective truth which he perceives.»[730] Eliot had rejected the very possibility of accurate contextualization in 'Hamlet and his Problems' because this means having to know

728 «Not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously», 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 48.

729 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', *SE*, p. 136.

730 'Baudelaire in Our Time', *FLA*, p. 91.

«something which is by hypothesis unknowable.»[731] By 1930 Eliot is not changing his mind about the knowability of past events, but considering the scope of its intelligibility. This intelligibility is greater than he is prepared to admit in 'Hamlet and His Problems', but less than a simple understanding of the mind of the individual in the cultural terms set by a by-gone age. Eliot is most explicit in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* :

> We can learn something about poetry simply by studying what people have thought about it at one period after another; without coming to the stultifying conclusion that there is nothing to be said but that opinion changes. Second, the study of criticism, not as a sequence of random conjectures, but as re-adaptation, may also help us to draw some conclusions as to what is permanent or eternal in poetry, and what is merely the expression of the spirit of an age, and by discovering what does change, and how, and why, we may become able to apprehend what does not change.[732]

Eliot is not proposing historical erudition as the sole means to achieve true interpretation. According to Bradley's doctrine of immediate experience, the empirical truth of the experience is never immediately available and always mediated through reflection. The present may be provisional, but one must attempt to articulate what is definite about this provisionality or else accept our ultimate isolation from other times and other people. This is the fundamental cognitive and historical premise which haunts Eliot's critical development, and which forced him into a negative method in the first place; the very method Bradley suggests in 'The Presupposition of Critical History'.[733] Figural prophecy overcomes the problem of the isolation of the present without appealing to ideal historical realms or ineffable absolutes. It makes the finitude of the present the very link to other times, for they too are in the present, even if it is only their own.

For Edmund Husserl, in *The Origins of Geometry* (1939), the present can be made to perform the universal function rather than obstruct a coherent view of history. For him, like Bradley, facts are not a sufficient ground for history, yet he is clearer in expounding the relation between received facts and present experience:

> All [merely] factual history remains incomprehensible because, always merely drawing its conclusions naïvely and straightforwardly from facts, it never makes thematic the general ground of meaning upon

[731] 'Hamlet and his Problems', *SW*, pp. 102-103.

[732] *TUPUC*, p. 27.

[733] «It would indeed be strange if every record were authentic and trustworthy [. . .] Not one at the present time would dare say that such is the case; and such is not the case, then criticism, if it is to be criticism, must necessarily be to a certain extent negative», Bradley, 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', *Collected Essays*, I, p. 35.

which all such conclusions rest, has never investigated the immense structural a priori which is proper to it. Only the disclosure of the essential general structure lying in our present and then in every past or future historical present as such, and, in totality, only the disclosure of the concrete, historical time in which we live [. . .] – only this disclosure can make possible historical inquiry.[734]

Husserl is pointing out the importance of the essential general structures in historical inquiry; that is, the inner historicities of the persons taking part in their own present. This emphasis redeems the isolation of the ego by making its embodied historicity in the present the principal historical *a priori*, but which is thus relieved of its *beforeness*. This *a priori* must be emptied as much as possible of any idealizing implications, precisely because it refers to a concrete experience of the present not to an ideal origin in the past. This is perhaps the main historical point in *The Origins of Geometry*, that,

If the usual factual study of history in general, and in particular the history which in most recent times has achieved true universal extension over all humanity, is to have any meaning at all, such a meaning can only be grounded upon what we can here call the internal history.[735]

This confirms history as an epistemological and, hence, a cognitive enterprise which culminates in the allegorical vision and its prophetic mechanism in history – even if in the end Eliot settles for the attenuated version of rhetorical sincerity.

A year after 'Donne in Our Time', Eliot returned to the problem of the relation of the transient to the permanent. In 'A Commentary' for the *Criterion*, he contextualizes the debate philosophically, and takes the chance to bring home the latent criticism of the positivism of Pragmatism and Bergsonianism throughout his critical writings. He notes:

We may have forgotten the philosophy of James, we may sneer at the idea of 'progress' [. . .]; but we are still over-valuing the changing and ignoring the permanent.[736]

Against all appearances, Eliot is not promoting the permanent against the transient, but allocating the permanent its proper role in relation to the transient. Seeing the conjunction of these two temporal dimensions in the present, Eliot seeks to stress the value of the past, not only to the present one inhabits, but to the present of that past. The past is part of our present insofar as we are that past's future, though not necessarily its ultimate fulfilment, because our present is itself only final in the provisionality of being *ours*. Thus «the doctrine of progress

734 Derrida, Jacques, *Edmund Husserl's 'The Origins of Geometry': An Introduction* (1962), John P. Leavey trans. (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 174.

735 *Edmund Husserl's 'The Origins of Geometry'*, p. 180.

736 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, 12, no 46 (October 1932), p. 74.

cannot make the future seem to us more real than the present.»[737] The reality of time is in the presence of its own present, and this dimension of history must be taken into account in whatever the past might mean to us in the future. Lewis Freed suggests that for Eliot «the artist must construct his picture through his experience of the present, which is the only reality he knows»[738]. Thus the doctrine of progress, Eliot adds,

> lead us to take for granted that the past, any part or the whole of it, has its meaning only in the present; leads us to ask of any past age, not what it has been in itself, not what the individuals composing it have made of themselves, but, what has the age done for us?[739]

Eliot is very careful to stress that this is a theoretical position which does not translate practically. The present age may take itself seriously at the expense of appropriating the past as far as it is of value for itself because «in the practical activity, every living generation takes itself with equal seriousness.»[740] It would be impossible not to. Yet, as Eliot told us in his thesis, there is a difference between the past and our understanding of it in the future although one habitually ignores it:

> We are accustomed to form in the imagination the notion of a perfect idea of the past experience identical in content with the experience itself, and differing only in that it is present as a memory instead of past as an experience.[741]

It is a mistake to think that the present represents a simultaneous sedimentation of everything which *has been*, although it is only right to accept that the present is all we have to understand the past by. But just as we cannot pretend to understand the past in its own reality to itself one cannot expect the future to make absolute sense of our reality. The absolute function in history is thus reduced to the finite experience of the present by those in its presence; the only point of definite historical comparison being that relation in every present. It is on this aspect of finite – cognitive and historical – existence that one can find the key of permanence.

The main shift to 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' comes in the implied alteration to the famous dictum that «the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the

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737 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, 12, no 46 (October 1932), p. 75.

738 Lewis Freed, *T. S. Eliot: The Critic as Philosopher* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1979), p. 206.

739 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, 12, no 46 (October 1932), p. 75.

740 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, 12, no 46 (October 1932), p. 75

741 *KE*, pp. 49.

pastness of the past, but of its presence.»[742] The twist comes in the re-interpretation of this sentence in the light of later criticism. It involves the semantic expansion of the sentence to include not only the presence of the past to ourselves, but the presence of the past to itself. It is this presence which controls the permanence of an ever-changing tradition as new interpretations and works are added on. In 'Donne in Our Time', Eliot suggests that he does not expect the future to confirm his high opinion of Donne; that «[his] poetry is a concern of the present and the recent past, rather than of the future.»[743] Thus Eliot's historicism develops a critical self-consciousness which makes him wonder whether his opinions will survive the test of time; or is it a slyly prescriptive statement hiding behind the tone of eulogy and valediction? Eliot adds:

> We must assume, if we are to talk about poetry at all, that there is some absolute poetic hierarchy; we keep at the back of our minds the reminder of some end of the world, some final Judgement Day, on which the poets will be assembled in their ranks and orders. In the long run, there is an ultimate greater and less. But at any particular time, we exist only in particular moments of time, good taste consists, not in attaining to the vision of Judgement Day, and still less in assuming that what happens to be important for us now is certainly what will be important in the same way on that occasion, but in approximating to some analysis of the absolute and the relative in our own appreciation.[744]

Just as Eliot emphasizes the finite scope of his critical interest in Donne as an interest of the present and not of the future, he «must assume» that there is a greater context to his meaning other than the historically immediate. This greater context is the fulfilment of all time in the Christian terms of Judgement Day. But what is crucial about this passage for our purposes, is Eliot's simultaneous commitment to the finitude of one's present; that «at any particular time, we exist only in particular moments of time». We can only do, Eliot seems to suggest, the best we can with what we have got. Yet there is a method to this admission of limitation, and in this we should bear in mind the mechanism of figural prophecy. It recalls Erich Auerbach's statement that «figural meaning in the strict sense, in the Old Testament is the prefiguration of the coming of Christ.»[745]

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742 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 49.

743 'Donne in Our Time', *A Garland for John Donne*, p. 5.

744 'Donne in Our Time', *A Garland for John Donne*, p. 5.

745 Erich Auerbach's 'Figura' in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature,* Theory and History of Literature, vol. 9 (Manchester university Press, 1984), p. 42.

When Auerbach argues that «*figura* often appears in the sense of deeper meaning in reference to future things»[746], he is pointing out the importance of temporal expectations in the re-capture of meanings in and by the world. The spiritual is thus posited materially as an achievable event in the future. But given that the figural method is modelled around the coming of Christ – a prophecy which, in other words, has already happened – the future is somehow already posited in the past and futurity is automatically retrospective. To engage in the hypothesis of what we might mean to the future is already to consider the extent to which we understand the past in their own expectation of futurity. The hinge of this temporal consideration is the present, which brings a ground to what could otherwise be seen as a «metonymic chain of deflections [. . .] that signifies a progressive creation of metaphors [which] give the *illusion* of an *open* structure that is impossible to terminate, and which has an *arbitrary* ending»[747], as Julia Kristeva points out in an examination of the changing fortunes of semiotics entitled 'From Symbol to Sign'. The closure of figural prophecy in Auerbach's terms completes Kristeva's account of the semiotics of the sign. This closure is both definitive but provisional.

In the context of figural prophecy the relative affirmation that something is true in so far as it was one's own opinion at the time adopts a degree of permanence. Or as he puts it in the final sentence of *The Criterion* Commentary: «My objection is that it just happens to be mistaken»[748], that a legitimate reason for an expressed opinion is to have held it. And that admission is going far enough, particularly when one admits that one could have another opinion, but not at the time when one professed it. The present may change, but it does not change to itself, though it may always seek ultimate confirmation in the future. The important thing is to make that cohere with future changes of opinion: with the feeling that one was at the time, as much as one can tell, 'sincere'. This admission of change is thus controlled by a historicism of the present, precisely in a way that prevents the element of transience from

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[746] Auerbach, 'Figura', p. 35.

[747] Julia Kristeva, 'From Symbol to Sign' in *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi ed. (Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp 70-71.

[748] 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, 11, no 44 (April 1932), p. 473.

falling into mere historical relativism, or entrapment in one's finite solitude, or, as Eliot put it, «the stultifying conclusion that there is nothing to be said but that opinion changes.»[749] Just where figural prophecy insists that «the prophetic figure [. . .] is a concrete historical fact, and it is fulfilled by concrete historical facts»[750], Eliot's historicism is nothing else than the affirmation of the present as a material entity which does not ultimately change but lies itself open to the confirmation of the future as it looks back on it as a past. This is the historical sense which ultimately seeks to redeem the inescapability of the present as a means to transcendental validation.

The Historicism of Eliot's Rhetorical Development.

The advantage of the allegorical method is that it allows us to apply a historical hermeneutics to Eliot's own critical rhetoric; to determine the extent to which what he meant then is still available now. We must test whether the Eliot of 'the historical sense' admits further readings, or semantic expansions. Or whether to read into it is to pervert its original meaning. In the context of allegorical readings we must consider whether the original, literal, meanings behind Eliot's critical statements are already prepared to admit re-interpretations in the future without losing their claims to permanence. In 'The Modernist Essay: The Case of T. S. Eliot - Poet as Critic', J. P. Riquelme notes that:

> Eliot was, in fact, not involved in redefining the canon only by means of conventional literary critical argumentation. In addition, through his writing practice he changed our understanding of the possibilities for expression in prose.[751]

This statement indicates that, for Riquelme, Eliot was rhetorically enacting the very historicism he was promoting. He explicitly refers to the allegorical elements of Eliot's style, and he argues that the force of this allegorical rhetoric lies precisely in encouraging constant deferral of meaning by

> calling up and shifting between a variety of issues, often elliptically and incongruously, evoking one issue indirectly by means of another, even suggesting in a single comment or in a sequence of comments scattered among different essays that shifting from one context to another is the best we can hope to do. This sort of

749 *TUPUC*, p. 27.

750 Auerbach, 'Figura', p. 30.

751 J. P. Riquelme, ''The modernist Essay: The Case of T. S. Eliot - Poet as Critic' in *Southern Review*, 21, no 4 (October 1985), p. 1026.

> allegorical method relies in continual deferrals of meaning in response to multiple, interlocking issues and to unanswered, unanswerable questions.[752]

The difficulty with this interpretation is that it gives up the possibility of there being a definite meaning; that all future interpretations collapse into an unrelated succession of reinterpretations with no hope of a resolution in the manner of Kristeva's rendering. This proposition makes the coherence of Eliot's thought impossible, making a virtue of what is in the end the ultimate critical condemnation. Riquelme ignores the more subtle mechanism by which Eliot seeks a form of closure to his statements without claiming absolute meaning. This mechanism is particularly evident in Eliot's critical self-historicism.

It is a trait of Eliot's criticism to reflect upon earlier essays and articles and speculate – particularly in his prefaces – on the relation to the new ones, and the effect the new ones have on the old. Particularly he seeks to contextualize their moment of production. In the preface to the 1964 edition to *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, we find the following words:

> I reprint *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* in the faint hope that one of these lectures may be taken instead of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' by some anthologists of the future. That, the best known of my essays, appeared in 1917, when I had taken over the assistant-editorship of the *Egoist* on Richard Aldington's being called up for military service, and before I had been asked to contribute to any other periodical [. . .] My earliest critical essays, dating from a period when I was somewhat under the influence of Ezra Pound's enthusiasm for Remy de Gourmont, came to seem to me the product of immaturity – though I do not repudiate 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.[753]

The consequences of this statement is to re-affirm the importance of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', just as it purports to encourage its demise. In effect Eliot is urging us to read 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in its own terms. That is, telling us of the reasons why we should choose to read *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* instead sets the tone in which 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' should be re-read, if only because it makes its re-reading imperative. In the end Eliot does not repudiate it. The problem is an important one as Stan Smith points out:

> [1914] on the calendar, for Modernism, is the most up-to-date in the world: today – the very moment of writing, at the cutting-edge of the new. But the other side of the coin is that today rapidly becomes yesterday, and there is nothing more out-of-date than yesterday's news.[754]

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[752] Riquelme, *Harmony of Dissonances*, p. 112.

[753] *TUPUC*, pp. 9-10.

[754] Stan Smith, *The Origins of Modernism* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 7.

The importance of the present in Modernism offers two alternatives: to concede to the incessant devalorization of its transient nature or to enact a constant contextualization of the present on its own terms as an act of temporal preservation. If Eliot is preserving the legitimacy of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' as a *product of immaturity*, he does so, as Smith notes, by misdating it; he places it in 1917 rather than the original date of publication in 1919. Furthermore, he refers to it as his earliest critical essay, forgetting perhaps 'Reflections on *Vers Libre* ', itself published in 1917. There is an element of undecidability about what exactly Eliot gets wrong: is it the title or the date of the critical essay? Smith adds that:

> A Modernism much concerned with simultaneity, with the past as co-presence, and with hindsight masquerading as foresight, misplaces it own founding moment, the point at which it first theorised itself. In its very inception, Modernism is not present to itself, is, indeed, ahead of itself by two whole years. In my beginning is, perhaps, not my end, but my absence.[755]

As Eliot pointed out in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent': «for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered.»[756] Misdating is, indeed, a form of accuracy, particularly when by so doing Eliot is referring to the contextual imperative of every present. Even if the possibility of the fulfilment of the present is not absolute Eliot recognizes the dating process as a natural historical impulse. Contextualization is already to appropriate the past with the present precisely because it is bound to be inaccurate. Eliot embraces this inaccuracy as the only form of dating, preserving, as it were, the *idea* of a present without claiming the absolute access he must fail to achieve. One's origins are never experienced as a present, as beginnings go they are always in the past. That 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is not Eliot's earliest critical essay suggests that the present has a way of not being self-evident; it implies an origin for itself which is never final. Eliot is not concerned with «the simultaneity of the past as co-presence» as Smith points out, although there is some truth in his «hindsight masquerading as foresight». But that is quite a different point and not a criticism. It is an important strategy through which the ephemerality of the present is given permanent status. Hindsight is the method by which the present stops being

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[755] Stan Smith, *The Origins of Modernism*, p. 24.

[756] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SW*, p. 50

an unnoticeable and meaningless instant.[757] In 'Burnt Norton' Eliot confronts the idea of an absolute present, which brings the demise of temporality,

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable.[758]

Yet the present makes temporality possible because there is always the possibility that it could have been otherwise, even if, having taken place, any alternative would seem an absurd consideration. Regret, like mourning, is a sentiment deeply entangled in the human experience of the present:

> What might have been is an abstraction
> Remaining a perpetual possibility
> Only in a world of speculation.
> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present.[759]

The process by which one pretends to prophetically know the future of the past with the hindsight that one's present is *that* past's future is a form of legitimate historical engagement; it is a prophetic historicism rather than mythical-magical omniscience. This is the very strategy I have been describing as 'figural prophecy' and which Eliot refers to as a mythical strategy in '*Ulysses*, Order and Myth' (1923):

> [Myth] is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.[760]

The most important temporal myth is perhaps not that there is an ideal and final origin, but that there is such a thing as an intelligible present. In this early essay the idea of the present becomes a method of temporal reconciliation, of «manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity»; it is «a step towards making the modern world possible for art.»[761] The present is only a deduction which can only be induced retrospectively as an event

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[757] «Let us consider, then, O human soul, whether present time can be long [. . .] If we conceive of some point of time which cannot be divided into even the minutests parts of moments, that is the only point that can be called present: and that point flees at such lightning speed from being future to being past, that it has no extent duration at all. For if it were so extended, it would be divisible into past and future: the present has no length», St Augustine, *Confessions*, F. J. Sheed trans., Peter Brown intro. (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993), p. 220-221.

[758] 'Burnt Norton', Four Quartets, *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), ll. 1-5, p. 189.

[759] 'Burnt Norton', ll. 6-10, p. 189.

[760] '*Ulysses*, Order and Myth' (1923), *SP*, p. 177.

[761] '*Ulysses*, Order and Myth' (1923), *SP*, pp. 177 &178.

which will happen again because it has happened in the past; its end is the promise of its recuperation. It is not as Smith suggest that «in my beginning is, perhaps, not my end, but my absence»[762], if anything that is the challenge, to see in the necessary end of every beginning *qua* beginning a definite presence whose termination is evidence of its having existed as a present experience.[763]

This temporal presence becomes the essential cognitive imperative of history; that, as Husserl points out:

> Even if we know almost nothing about the historical surrounding world of the first geometers, this much is certain as an invariant, essential structure: that it was a world of *things* (including the human beings themselves as subjects of this world).[764]

In his doctoral thesis Eliot follows suit: «Let us say, we have to present it as it would have looked had we, with our bodies and our nervous systems, been there to see it.»[765] The historicism of the present as presence inevitably subsumes a theory of cognition as its lowest denominator: that man experiences things, not perceive facts, in time. Thus Eliot writes in *The Criterion*:

> All great art is in a sense a document on its time; but great art is not merely a document, for mere documentation is not art. All great art has something permanent and universal about it, and reflects the permanent as well as the changing – a particular relation in time of the permanent and the transient.[766]

It conditions what is generally accepted as factual history. Husserl sums up my complaint more eloquently. He says:

> For romantic spirits the mythical-magical elements of the historical and prehistorical aspects of mathematics may be particularly attractive; but to cling to this merely historically factual aspect of mathematics is precisely to lose oneself to sort of romanticism and to overlook the genuine problem, the internal-historical problem, the epistemological problem.[767]

Figural prophecy cuts across these two extremes offering not only a new epistemology, but a new semiology. It marks the end of the symbolic image and absolute history. It opens the possibility of the recuperation of things in the act of being experienced, that is, in time; a

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762 Stan Smith, *The Origins of Modernism*, p. 24.

763 Compare this idea with my analysis of *Vita Nuova*'s temporal strategies in 'The Failure of Discourse: *Vita Nuova* and 'Paradiso', Chapter 6.

764 *Edmund Husserl's 'The Origins of Geometry'*, p. 177.

765 *KE*, p. 22.

766 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, 12, no 46 (October 1932), p. 76.

767 *Edmund Husserl's 'The Origins of Geometry'*, p. 180.

semiology deeply aware of human participation through interpretation. This is not symbol or metaphor, but Allegory, so that Dante's poetic virtue is to «make[s] us see what he saw.»[768] This is not a simple allegorization of objects – which may in fact verge on the symbolic -, but one deeply aware of the mythologizing mechanism of perception. A rhetoric deeply entrenched in what I refer to as, the figural prophecy of allegory. This mythology must at any rate be distinguished from romantic nostalgia or Victorian rhetoric, to do so would be to miss the principal feature of Eliot's critical writing. Unfortunately this is what Edward Lobb insists on doing when he says that,

> Eliot also learned a good deal about the conduct of argumentation from the Romantics and their nineteenth century successors. The use of historical myth is in itself, of course, as much an argumentative technique as an idea.[769]

Yes, but in Eliot this combination between rhetoric and history refuses to be merely figurative; and, without rejecting the influence of Romanticism, one must consider the fact that this comparison is not definitive as to the kind of tradition Eliot was working in. Nor is it true to say that Eliot's access to Medievalism is merely mediated by Romanticism. Quite clearly, he was well aware of the pre-Raphaelite misprisions to be avoided when dealing with medieval allegory. Historically or rhetorically, allegory was not, in itself, a figure of speech.

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The self-consciousness of the modern world undermines the visual immediacy of the allegorical method, yet offers the possibility for its compensation through a new form of expression which marks a move away from poetics to rhetoric. Rhetoric becomes an imperative of literary responsibility at the point where the immediacy of the poetic expression and time-less art is no longer available; when poetry has stopped being the expression of the mind of a whole people.

Critical mediation demands rhetorical sincerity as a means to find coherence in judgement. The problem of coherence is thus an epistemological pursuit at a cognitive, and historical level, and which demands their simultaneous resolution. Eliot pursues this resolution

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768 *Dante*, p. 23.

769 Edward Lobb, *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition* (London: Routledge Keegan & Paul, 1981), p. 136.

stylistically through the development of a critical discourse. For him, this resolution amounts to a latent philosophical struggle, not only about finding epistemological answers, but about the possibility of articulating them. Eliot's experience with philosophy was important in making apparent the urgency of the problem of style in criticism, and initially offered him provisional models on which to experiment.

The scientific models Eliot uses in his early criticism gradually reveal a rhetorical tension with the positions he held as a philosophy student. This tension takes his criticism beyond the logical paradigm that he set for himself in the 1910s. The nature of this transgression can be seen as the residue of metaphysical discourse that Eliot is unable to exorcize in his early literary criticism. On the whole his critical development must be seen as his attempt to articulate this residue through the medium of literary studies. Literature offers Eliot a system in which to fulfil his demand for the absolute statement promised by the sciences. Logic as a model for poetics fails at the point that the articulation of the objective correlative, the impersonal theory of poetry and Tradition prove inconclusive. This is the point where Eliot's rhetorical compensations must be noted, and with it the parallel problem of the articulation of metaphysics.

The critical imperative to see things as they really are becomes throughout Eliot's criticism a dynamic motto whose scientific nature gradually reveals a cognitive dimension and which, in the end, becomes a stylistic rule: to say what one means in the words one thinks them. This development becomes an admission about the limits of immediate perception, and an incorporation of the mediating role of thought which still insists on a cognitive ground in judgement. Thought becomes a problem of doctrine just as Eliot re-interprets cognition in terms of 'belief'. The private finitude of thought-systems is thus partially over-come, as belief stops being a problem of doctrinal exclusivity but of an inclusive cognitive vision. For Eliot belief is integral to ordinary cognition, where understanding is a form of belief which, in turn, is about seeing what others see. In this process doctrine becomes a cultural object subject to the general problems of cognition; it must be seen rather than predetermine what we see. Doctrine must be cognitively validated as a cultural experience at which point it transcends the very cultural

barriers which make it available. This shift goes some of the way in resolving the metaphysical problem of philosophy. Culture offers the expression of the metaphysical *a priori* of judgement which Eliot ultimately embraces and includes in the cognitive experience as philosophical worldviews. He articulates this resolution in the term 'philosophical' poetry, which marks a commitment towards positive expression, just as the negative expression of 'metaphysics' becomes a logical *cul de sac*. This is what the Metaphysical poets make apparent; where the adjective 'metaphysical' fails to be more than a figurative description which fails to achieve philosophical or historical fulfilment. This failure is made explicit in the context of allegory, which gradually begins to dictate the workings of Eliot's critical discourse.

Eliot exploits the visual dimension of cognition in terms of medieval allegory, but which is re-worked as rhetoric. This re-working becomes necessary as philosophy is no longer as culturally available as it once was, which parallels the moment at which poetry also ceases to be the expression of the mind of a whole people. This point marks the beginning of self-consciousness and criticism. Allegorical fulfilment becomes instead a problem of rhetorical and historical sincerity. History and rhetoric come together when to say what we mean in the words we think them becomes a historical problem once one has to consider the extent to which saying something in the past retains a value in what it means now and will mean in the future. This problem can be contextualized in the figural prophecy of allegory and used to re-read Eliot's criticism and understand his development; particularly in terms of his increasing dogmatism and the extent to which his early scientific approach retains validity. This approach reveals an important rhetorical dimension to Eliot's critical style which can be focused on the importance of literal and figurative readings of his critical language.

The importance of rhetorical fidelity to our meaning must ultimately be related to the position of the subject in time; to the context present to oneself. Yet, if all meaning is not to be simply contextual, this historical imperative must become a stylistic concern relating to the distinction between what one is saying from what one means; being capable, that is, to distinguish the literal from the figurative. Eliot is ultimately concerned with this historical dimension in relation to his own style: with the importance of accepting that one can only have

said what one meant then, while still claiming that one means the same thing now only one would put it differently. This is ultimately the problem tackled by figural prophecy in considering the extent to which events in time are literal to themselves, yet figurative in terms of the interpretations by which they become meaningful in the future. The present becomes the axis of coherence in judgement, just as it includes in its significance not only what it means to itself but it is actively engaged in predicting what it will mean in the future, as we try to understand what the past means both to us and to itself.

By 1933 Eliot concludes a significant period of criticism which demands the asking of precisely these questions; it asks us to re-read its beginnings while it points to a new period in which Eliot's rhetorical commitment to criticism crystallises into a more open politicization of his discourse in what appears to be a further shift towards the cultural re-construction of his time. It is not within the scope of this thesis to consider readings of this later work, if only to consider that Eliot's rhetorical commitment to say what he means in the words he thinks it becomes increasingly predetermined by ideology as the inevitable historical *given* to thought. One is left wondering whether Eliot *believes* what he says, or simply means to say what he has to after 1933; whether he is being ideologically sincere. The answer to these questions must be tackled from the rhetorical framework I have developed in this thesis; one must not look at his ideology alone, but to the way Eliot articulates it. Sincerity is, in the end, a rhetorical question.

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